

ABSTRACT

YOU ARE FIRED: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF PASTORAL PERSPECTIVES ON TERMINATION IN A PARTICULAR COUNTY OF NORTH TEXAS

by

Bruce E. Pratt

The purpose of this study was to explore the phenomenon of clergy termination from the perspective of pastors and clergy spouses who have experienced termination in churches located within a particular county in north Texas. The study was birthed out of my personal experience with an attempted pastoral termination.

The theological section of the dissertation sought to place the termination experience within the larger framework of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. The literature review quantified previous research on pastoral termination, illustrated a paucity of literature surrounding the subject of pastoral termination, illuminated the impact of a narcissistic culture on the pastorate, and explored the literature on clergy spouses.

The survey instrument was a qualitative phenomenological interview study that searched for themes among the participants. The focus of the study was an examination of how pastors and their spouses interpreted the crisis of pastoral termination theologically, how the termination experience affected their beliefs, and how the termination experience affected their way of life.

The findings of this study suggest that pastors and spouses view termination and pastoral ministry through the theological lens of Jesus as Pascal Lamb. Both pastors and

spouses identified with Jesus and his suffering on the cross. They hoped that God could use this trauma redemptively in their own lives and in the lives of the people they served.

The findings also suggest that pastors and their spouses believe that humanity is sinful and broken and that clergy couples need to be realistic about how they view their congregations. The reality that the church is composed of broken people is something each participant stressed as an important factor in clergy termination.

The final finding suggests that clergy and their spouses need to have a support network outside of the congregation. Friendships and family relationships play a vital role in enabling clergy families to navigate crisis.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled
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by

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM

Introduction

Christ imputes a special bond when a pastor accepts a call to shepherd a church. Any installation/ordination ceremony has an atmosphere similar to a wedding. Such an atmosphere is proper because the bond between a pastor and a congregation is intimate. When a congregation seeks to remove its pastor, the atmosphere of the church is similar to the atmosphere of a family experiencing a divorce. The phenomenon of pastoral termination is fast becoming an epidemic in the United States. Pastors are being forcibly removed from their congregations for many reasons. When individuals enter seminary they do not contemplate that one day they may be fired from a church. One enters ministry to care for people not to fight with them.

The national climate concerning forced terminations of clergy in their churches is alarming (Chezlik; Hodges; Luo; "Touchstone" 41; Tu). John C. LaRue, Jr. says that 23 percent of all clergy in the United States have been forced out of their churches ("Forced Exits: A Too-Common Ministry Hazard"). Out of that percentage, 62 percent of those pastors were forced out by churches that had previously forced out another pastor ("Forced Exits: High Risk Churches"). Focus on the Family pastoral ministries conducted a survey of pastors in 2009. According to that survey, 23 percent of respondents experienced a forced resignation/termination (5). Dean R. Hodge and Jacqueline E. Wenger found that 30-40 percent of the pastors who participated in their research were forced out of their congregations (49). The major pieces of research on the issue of pastoral termination illustrate the severity of the issue. The practical application of the

numbers means that one-quarter of all pastors will experience a forced termination during their careers. Clearly, numbers as high as the ones given indicate that pastoral termination is a silent crisis within American churches.

The issue of pastoral termination is further complicated by two dynamics. First, the emotional dynamics of a church are such that termination from a church is likened to a divorce (Friedman 1, 26). When a person is fired from a job, he or she can become depressed and infuriated. Because a church's emotional field is like that of a family, pastoral termination becomes a traumatic experience for the pastor, the pastor's family, and the congregation, and the issue of position availability adds to the trauma experienced by pastors and their families. The Hartford Institute estimates 335,000 congregations in the United States ("Fast Facts"). The statistic for the duration of pastoral search is 55 percent of pastors must search longer than four months to find a new position; and only 40 percent of ousted pastors receive a severance package (LaRue, "Forced Exits: Preparation and Survival"). The clergy family has already experienced the trauma of a forced termination and must now face the financial burden that comes from a complete lack of severance, as well as a protracted search for a new position in a church.

Personal Experience

In 2007, a group of people led by a member who had left the church, a couple who had just finished their board terms, a wedding coordinator who had been removed from her position, and her husband, started the process to remove me as pastor of the church I serve. The couple formerly on the board spearheaded the effort by sending a four-page tirade to the new board, stating that if I removed the wedding coordinator, who was at the center of the conflict, they were going to come after me (Poirier 40; Van

Yperen 153-62; McKinney 30-31). The board did not acquiesce to the demands of the letter. The group then sent out a one-hundred page mailing consisting of fifty pages of testimonials discussing abuses I had visited upon the former members of the church and fifty pages of all the mistakes I had made during my tenure as pastor. This group created a Web page for people to visit and view a DVD of video testimonials, which they distributed.

The board and I agreed to short circuit the conflict and call for the vote asking for my resignation. The dissenting group got over 50 percent of the votes but did not get the required 75 percent for my removal. This validity of the vote was questionable because some of the voting block was composed of people who had not attended the church in years. Under normal circumstances, these people would not be considered members; however, because they were not notified *in writing* about their membership status, they insisted that they were still members of the church. The group included members who had moved to other parts of the country and were flown in to vote. The scope of the abuse by this group went beyond me as they attacked anyone who supported me and the members of the board. Three months after the vote, this group was still trying to create dissention by hiring a private investigator to create salacious, false allegations against a member of the board.

My experience is not unique (Dodds 152). Pastors all over the United States have shepherded conflicted churches that eventually fired them. The phenomenon is real for pastors in a county in north Texas, which is the focus of this research. The pastors that participated in the research either experienced pastoral termination or outlasted a call for termination while serving churches in the particular county.

When considering the forced resignations in north Texas, no standard category of analysis exists to explain the phenomenon. All of these churches are of different denominations, different sizes, different worship formats, and different governing structures. The churches represent a small cross-section of American Protestant life. Some of the conflicted churches had memberships over one thousand people, while other churches had fifty.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the phenomenon of clergy termination from the perspective of pastors and clergy spouses who have experienced termination.

Research Questions

In order to achieve the purposes of the study the following questions were utilized.

Research Question #1

How do these pastors and spouses interpret their termination experience theologically?

Research Question #2

How has the termination experience affected these pastors' and spouses' beliefs?

Research Question #3

How has the termination experience affected the pastors' and spouses' way of life?

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study the term *forced termination* is used to describe any situation where a termination is initiated by individuals or groups. Polity structure like

congregational, presbyterian, and Episcopal, are included in the definition of termination. Pastors who lose their employment and those who are pressured to move to a new position are terminated. In termination, a ministry ends because a congregation, a senior member of the pastoral staff, or group of people within a particular congregation initiates the separation.

For the purposes of this study, the term *theological* is an epistemology through which people view and synthesize their life's experiences.

Ministry Project

I conducted the ministry project by interviewing former pastors and their spouses in a particular county in north Texas whose congregations had either sought their removal or were successful in removing them. I interviewed each person separately outside of the presence of his or her spouse. A researcher-designed semi-structured interview protocol encompassed a standard prepared list of questions. I asked follow-up questions as needed for clarification. The participants who had relocated to other towns were interviewed using video conferencing. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. I used textual analysis by coding the answers in the transcriptions. I combined similar answers into themes, which I collapsed into clusters that repeated themselves in each interview. To test for inter-rater reliability two additional independent raters read the transcriptions and verified the data and its interpretations.

Context

A major dynamic of the ministry context is the current economic wealth of the county in relation to the rest of the United States. Of the nine towns within the particular county, all but one has a median household income above the national average. In fact,

two of the towns within this particular county have a median household income above \$100,000. The wealth opportunities of the county are so unique that various residents receive dividend checks from gas companies drilling near their property (“What Is the Barnett Shale Area Formation”). The ethnic demographic of the county are an important factor to life in the county, 79 percent of the county is Caucasian (“S0201”).

The demographics of the county are important to consider because they paint a picture of the ministry context. In ministry, as in life, context is everything. The demographic numbers are so lopsided that that they need to be recognized. The study does not explore how economic and ethnic breakdowns contribute to pastoral termination; however, the context had an impact on the lives of the interviewees and their family’s life. The ministry context of the pastors interviewed in the study was to churches that were predominantly Caucasian and upper-middle class (Zhou and Gao; Miller and Josephs).

The theological context of the particular county is that it is highly churchied. However, a unique piety exists in the various churches in the area. The southern Baptist convention has a large number of churches in the particular and surrounding counties. These Southern Baptist churches have melded the evangelistic desire to *get people saved* with Calvinism. The blend of Southern Baptist life and Calvinism creates a milieu in which the nuances and tensions of the Bible and the Christian life are jettisoned for a faith life seeking stability, conformity, and control with easy answers. Whenever an individual or group is encouraged to explore the issues of faith in Christ, the discussion finishes with an appeal to the absolute sovereignty of God. The style of Calvinism is similar to the fatalism of the first century. Equally disturbing is the melding of fatalism

with dispensational eschatology. A cultural piety within the Christian population cultivates a mentality that insists that Christ's return is imminent, nothing can be done to stop it or speed it up, and the signs are everywhere, so Christians need to urge people into salvation. Blend this attitude with Calvinism and a view emerges that says Christians should urge people into saved because Jesus is coming back, but in the end whether or not they go to heaven is not up to anyone but God. In the meantime, Christians should be glad that God has chosen them and accept his absolute sovereign plan and will for their life.

Methodology

I specifically chose the qualitative phenomenological approach to the issue of forced resignation because it illuminates the pastors' and spouses' perception of their experience of termination. Participants are encouraged to articulate the trauma from a theological point of view, describe how their beliefs about God have changed, and how this shift in belief has affected how they live, and what has happened to personal relationships post-termination. Phenomenological research understands that the participants are experts of their own experience. The research approach allows data to emerge that might have been overlooked with a survey.

Participants

The participants in the study were chosen out of the population of pastors in a county located in the north Texas area. The pastors were selected because either they withstood a group seeking their resignation or they were forced to resign from their positions.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation used for this study was a researcher-created semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix A). The problem statement, the purpose statement, and the research from Chapter 2 formed the basis of this instrument.

Variables

No independent or dependant variables exists in the study. The polity of the participants is an intervening variable in the study.

Data Collection

I digitally recorded interview data, which was then transcribed. Follow-up questions were asked when necessary. The interviews lasted an hour.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the transcriptions and placed them into text segments. I coded the text segments for meaning. I analyzed and coded the segments, I then collapsed them into cluster themes. Two additional independent raters analyzed the transcripts to check the reliability of the conclusions.

Generalizability

The scope of the research covered a ten-year span from 1999-2009. The study is applicable to Protestant churches located within upper-middle class, Caucasian, suburban neighborhoods in North America.

Theological Foundation

The singular theological theme for the study is the image of Jesus as the *Good Shepherd* of John 10:1-18. The immediate context of the Good Shepherd is chapter nine, which records Jesus healing a man born blind. The Jewish leaders of the day who

witnessed the miracle would not celebrate God's movement in the life of an individual.

Whatever the reason, the Jewish leaders responded to the miraculous with hostility.

Immediately following the healing, the leaders interrogated the blind man about who had healed him and what he thought of the miracle worker. Jesus used his *sitz im leben* to offer the teaching about himself as the Good Shepherd.

The Good Shepherd

Jesus teaches his disciples why he was the Good Shepherd juxtaposing himself to the Pharisees: he was the Good Shepherd, they were bad shepherds. Jesus offered three pronouncements that elucidate why he was the Good Shepherd, and by extension why the Pharisees were bad shepherds.

The shepherd imagery of John 10 evokes references to the Hebrew Scriptures in which God pronounces judgment upon the leaders of Israel because they were bad shepherds and did not take care of the people (Jer. 23, 25; Ezek. 34; Zech. 11). The table below contrasts the attributes of the Good Shepherd with the attributes of the bad shepherds in John 10 and Ezekiel 34.

Table 1.1. Attributes of the Good Shepherd

The Good Shepherd		The Bad Shepherds	
John 10:2	Enters by the door	John 10:1	Does not enter by the door; climbs in another way
John 10:3	Sheep know his voice; calls the sheep by name, leads the sheep	John 10:5	Sheep flee from the stranger because they do not know his voice.
John 10:7	Jesus is the door.	John 10:8	Those who came before were thieves and robbers.
John 10:9-10	Saves the sheep and gives them pasture; gives abundant life.	John 10:10	Steal, kill, and destroy
John 10:11	Lays his life down for the sheep	John 10:12	Is a hired hand that flees the sheep at the arrival of wolves
John 10:14	The shepherd knows the sheep and knows the Father.		
		Ezekiel 34:2	Shepherds feed themselves instead of the sheep.
		Ezekiel 34:3	Use the sheep to their advantage at the expense of the flock
		Ezekiel 34:4	Did not strengthen the sick, heal the diseased, bind up the broken, seek the scattered and lost; did dominate the sheep with power
		Ezekiel 34:6	The sheep are scattered and become prey for beasts.

A summary of Table 1.1 leads to overarching truths about the Good Shepherd and about bad shepherds. First, Jesus was the Good Shepherd because he was the door by which the sheep enter. Jesus knew the Father and was obedient to the Father and was the door; he did not have to gain access to the sheep by another way. As the door, Jesus offered the people of Israel and, by extension, the other Gentile sheep eternal, abundant,

life. By contrast, the bad shepherds, the Pharisees and the leaders of God's people who went before, were not the door. They could not offer eternal life, and they did not gain access to the sheep in a manner worthy of God because they did not know the Father. Jesus said these shepherds were of Satan.

Second, Jesus was the Good Shepherd because he intimately knew the sheep. Jesus called the sheep by name. In turn, the sheep knew the voice of the shepherd and followed him. Being the good shepherd involved intentional and intimate relationship with the flock as Jesus had this. The bad shepherds did not take the time to know the flock. They do not call the sheep by name and they have no relational investment in the sheep. When the wolves came the hired hands abandoned the sheep.

Third, Jesus was the Good Shepherd ultimately because he chose to sacrifice himself for the benefit of the sheep. In the pericope of Scripture, Jesus said four times that he willingly laid down his life out of obedience to the Father. Jesus' sacrificial act came from the heart of the Trinity, the cross qualifies Jesus as the Good Shepherd (Peck, *Road Less Traveled* 94-97). In contrast, the bad shepherds described in Ezekiel were self-centered and took advantage of the sheep. Bad shepherds were concerned with their own needs and not the needs of the flock. Bad shepherds left the tasks of care unfinished and used their position as shepherds to wound the sheep. The sheep remained broken, wounded, diseased, hungry, and lost. In such a state, Satan easily consumed the sheep.

As the good shepherd, Jesus rekindled the Hebrew words of judgment against the shepherds of Israel. By interrogating the blind man about his healing and his belief in Jesus, the Pharisees were behaving as the *bad shepherds* of the Hebrew Scriptures. The only antidote to bad shepherds was the Good Shepherd, who is God. Jesus informed the

hearers that he was the fulfillment of the promise that God would become the shepherd of his people (Gen. 49:24; Ps. 23; Jer. 31:10; Ezek. 34:12-23; Matt. 2:6).

Implications for the Pastorate

The image of Jesus offers a rubric for a preliminary evaluation of a local church pastor. For any pastorate to be considered *good*, it must embody attributes of the ministry of the good shepherd. Pastors of local congregations need to have an intimate connection to the Father. The only way a human has a connection to the Father is to have a connection with Jesus. A *good* pastor of a local church needs to have an authentic relationship with Jesus.

For a pastorate to be considered good, the pastor needs to know intimately the sheep by name. Intimate relationships with people require time and effort. A pastor must be willing to spend time to get to know each person and his or her unique qualities in order for the sheep to be able to trust and follow the pastor's voice.

Finally, for a pastorate to be considered good the pastor needs to be willing to interact with the congregation in a sacrificial way. The particular pastorate may not require that the pastor actually die on behalf of the people, however, a pastor cannot be selfish with regard to the people. To have a ministry similar to that of the Good Shepherd, a pastor must not continually place his or her desires ahead of the people. The locus of focus is the determining factor between good and bad shepherds.

The distinguishing attribute of a pastorate that indicates bad shepherding is a selfish, self-centered pastorate. In Chapter 2 a comparison of dissertations reveals that pastoral/interpersonal incompetence is reason for termination. The incompetence issues falls under the category of *bad shepherding*. Bad shepherding may also be linked to the

issue of narcissism in the pastorate, which is explored in more detail in Chapter 2. Most of the qualities of bad shepherding surround different ways in which a shepherd places him or herself ahead of the sheep. If a pastor chooses to abandon the flock at the greatest moment of need because of an impending crisis or obstacle, he or she is a bad shepherd. If a pastor does not bother to take time to know the sheep and learn about them, he or she is a bad shepherd. A pastor not bothering to heal and help those sheep who are sick and broken, is being a bad shepherd. The pastor who uses the sheep or takes advantage of them for selfish gain, he or she is a poor shepherd.

The implications of good and bad shepherding for the topic of pastoral termination are real. Some congregations have pastors whose ministry would be considered good shepherding and yet congregations terminate them anyway. Many reasons exist as to why termination happens, the focus of the research was to explore the effect the seemingly unjustified termination scenario has on pastors and their spouses. Some congregations have pastors who have ministry that would be considered bad shepherding. The indictments made by God against the bad shepherds in Ezekiel 34 are legitimate, and therefore, are sufficient reason to terminate a pastor's ministry at any given church.

Overview

Chapter 2 reviews the literature associated with pastoral termination. Chapter 3 includes a discussion and explanation for the design of the study, research questions, population and sample, instrumentation, data collection, variables, and data analysis. Chapter 4 details the findings of the study. Chapter 5 provides a summary of the

conclusions derived from interpretation of the data as well as practical applications of the conclusions and further study possibilities.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the phenomenon of clergy termination from the perspective of pastors and clergy spouses who have experienced termination. In general, one can find copious amounts of literature regarding conflict in the church. A basic search on the Alban Institute's Web page using the term *church conflict* yields 327 results discussing what conflict is, how it manifests itself, how to handle it, and how to avoid it. When a conflict rises to the level of an actual termination, however, the literature becomes scarce. A similar search on the Alban Institute's Web using the term *pastoral termination* uncovered only eight results, some of which had nothing to do with the actual firing of a pastor. The lack of literature specifically addressing pastoral termination caused me to consider different areas of research concerning pastoral ministry to shed light on the termination phenomenon.

Pastoral Ministry—The Implications of Living Out a Representative Ministry

The theological image of the Good Shepherd creates the background against which the drama of pastoral ministry unfolds. To be a pastor is to re-present Christ to the Church:

Christian ministry from the outset has been conceived as a continuation of Christ's own ministry. Christ is the head of the church. The church celebrates Christ's capacity to discern what was subsequently to be needed for the continuation of his ministry.

From the Earthly ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, we learn the rudiments of Christian ministry. Jesus' vision and practice of ministry is significant for all Christian vision and practice of ministry. If ministry cannot be clearly established as the continuation of Jesus' own intention and practice, we lose its central theological premise. (Oden 59-60)

As such, whatever the ministry of the Good Shepherd is, pastoral ministry based on Christ ought to be the same. Pastors are under shepherds of the Good Shepherd (Wagner 91-154). Appropriately understood, the shepherding ministry of Christ manifested as Incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection will replay itself in the life of Christ's representative (Carroll 196-98). Christ's ministry has biblical images that offer insight into the experience of pastoral termination as a representative of Christ.

Biblical Images

The first biblical image of Jesus' ministry begins with his baptism. Jesus' baptism is a prerequisite of the Christian life and the first step of obedient ministry **Incarnational ministry by virtue of baptism**. When considering issues related to the pastoral ministry, the conversation involves the topic of baptism. A call to ordained ministry follows the individual Christian's call to become a disciple of Jesus. The call into the family of God is recognized and consummated with baptism. Christian baptism is the qualification into the ministry of Christ. As a result, Christians have particular experiences when they live in Christ. In Romans 6:1-11, the apostle Paul argues that when a Christian participates in the sacrament of baptism, he or she is literally joined with Christ in his death and in his tomb. Christians join with Christ so that the hope in the resurrection of the dead is sure. Christians literally die to sin so that they may live to God. Uniting with Christ in death means participating in his crucifixion. Romans 6:1-11 is clear that life with Christ, on this planet, involves a perpetual state of Christ's crucifixion and death. The Apostolic Fathers and the Puritan divines understood the perpetual state of Christ's crucifixion and death and referred to it as *the mortification of the flesh* (Ejenobo 313-14; Perriman 69; Cyril 154; Baxter 54). A crucified reality is part of the Christian's life and every Christian,

including pastors, will experience painful moments, which God uses as part of his or her baptism to conform the individual to the image of his beloved Son (A'Kempis 78-81).

However, ordained ministry is Christ's ministry and, therefore, a unique expression of the baptismal reality.

Participating in Christ's crucified ministry. Ordained ministry is a call to the ministry of Jesus himself. At its most basic level, when individuals stand as persons ordained in the ministry of Jesus Christ, Jesus will replicate his ministry *in them*. Jesus' ministry to the world was one of Incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection. Ministry rooted in Christ will follow this pattern. Whatever happened to Jesus will happen in ministry. As the incarnate Son, Jesus revealed God to the world. Pastors re-present Jesus to the people and incarnate gospel ministry. As Jesus' Incarnation is lived within the ministry, Jesus' crucifixion is also lived within the ministry.

Three passages explain that Jesus expects those who minister in his name to suffer on his behalf. The first passage was from Romans 6:1-11; the second is Mark 10:35-45. In the Markan Scripture, two disciples looked for fame and glory, yet Jesus promised them his passion, which is the cup, and his baptism, which is his death. Mark 10:35-45 not only applies to the specific disciples in the passage, it also applies to all who call themselves disciples of Jesus. Jesus calls his disciples to follow him and serve him, living sacrificially. Mark 10:35-45 reinforces the baptismal/crucifixional reality, and points to a specific requirement of those who seek to lead Christ's people to share in the passion and death of Christ (Reardon 107, 110-11).

The third passage that speaks to the reality of shared suffering by Jesus' shepherds is Philippians 3:8-11. The phrase "share in the fellowship of his sufferings,

being conformed to his death” is the operative statement of Philippians 3:8-11 (NASB). Paul considers his accomplishments dross compared to the rich glory of Christ’s resurrection power (Victorinus 271; Nee 13, 17). All three Scripture citations, Romans 6:1-11, Mark 10:35-35, and Philippians 3:8-11, speak to the participatory nature of gospel ministry with Jesus’ crucifixion being validated within the lives of ministers. The applications of this validation are simple.

If Jesus was betrayed and died because of the actions of those closest to him, then pastors must be willing to experience the same for those they serve (Somerville 43-45). If Jesus was accused of crimes he did not commit, pastors will be accused of things that they did not do. If Jesus was held captive and set up by the religious leaders of the day, then pastors who are a part of judicatories must realize that their authority structures will allow them to suffer for the perseverance of the whole. If the people used Jesus as a scapegoat, parishioners will also scapegoat pastors. If the same people singing, “Hosanna,” were shouting, “Crucify him,” then parishioners will sing the pastor’s praises and call for his or her resignation. Finally, pastors must embrace the manner in which God is working out his crucifixion in them. In the cross, Jesus’ very body literally absorbed the sin and evil of the world. When pastors embrace moments of crucifixion, through the power of the Holy Spirit, they absorb evil and God uses their suffering for redemptive purposes (Mariani 17).

Redemptive suffering. The understanding of redemptive suffering goes as follows. As a human being, Jesus was able to shed blood and be the perfect Pascal lamb for humanity. As a human, Jesus was able to take the sin of the world and the curse of death literally into his body and defeat it. As the Son, Jesus is an infinite being who is the

perfect sacrifice that has the infinite capacity to bear sins for all time. Only a God who is both finite and infinite can accomplish this unique task (Athanasius 48-49, 52). The suffering servant psalm of Isaiah 52:13-53:12 speaks of this role of the redemptive suffering of God's servant.

In terms of spiritual warfare, the crucifixion teaches that the triune God defeated evil and its minions of death and sin by absorbing them into his body. The resurrection power of God, of which Paul speaks, literally crushed these things in the glorified body of the resurrected Christ. The implications for Christians, and for leaders within the church, are tremendous. If Christians are baptized into Christ's death and a particular calling is placed on shepherds/leaders to participate in Christ's ministry, then pastors must expect that through the power of the Holy Spirit, God will allow them to suffer redemptively on behalf of the world (Col. 1:24). More specifically, pastors will redemptively suffer on behalf of their congregations and their suffering is a part of Christ's ongoing ministry as the Pascal lamb (Chrysostom 233). A reading of 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 illustrates that Paul saw redemptive suffering at work in his ministry. Paul believed that he literally carried Jesus' death in his body so that Jesus' life could also be seen. Paul and all those who are ordained to his ministry are agents of God's life by embodying Christ's death. When pastors embrace the suffering and rejection associated with termination by the congregation they were called to shepherd, Christ mortifies the pastor's flesh, validates his ministry within their bodies, and uses the pastors as vessels by which the sin and evil in a fallen world are destroyed and transformed (Peck, *People of the Lie* 268-69; Seamands 169-70). Pastors do not want to endure the pain of termination, yet God assures them that he will allow them to endure it and with their

crucifixion comes a resurrection. A view of pastoral termination viewed through the lens of Christ's overarching plan of salvation would be helpful in recovery from the trauma.

Vocation

Vocation is a term used to describe one's calling in life. In fact, clergy often refer to the ministry as a calling. The New Testament Greek word *voco* means *to call*.

Vocation is not simply a job; rather, vocation involves the totality of a person. Vocation requires that an individual's gifts, talents, motivations, and training, be activated for the tasks required by *the calling*. The Puritan divines believed that, biblically, every person had a calling by God. Vocation, in the Puritan worldview, applied to homemakers, pastors, lawyers, bankers, field hands, and farmers. God calls each person to a specific vocation (Ryken 15-16, 26-29). Christians have dimensions of calling that they all share regardless of position.

Scripture teaches that if one knows Jesus in a saving way they do so because God has called him or her to that vocation (W. Walker 205-06). Christian baptism augments the application of calling. All Christians are called by God to be his people, and baptism recognizes that reality. Children of God have a specific vocation to love God and their neighbor. In Matthew 22:35-40 Jesus was questioned by a lawyer seeking to engage him in a verbal joust. The lawyer asks Jesus which is the greatest commandment, and Jesus, being involved in God's inner life, responded by citing the *Shemah* of Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and a law from Leviticus 19:18. Jesus went on to say that the Law and the prophets are summed up in these verses. The greatest commandment for human beings is to love God. Love is born in the very heart of God. To love God with all one's heart is to behave like one of the members of the Trinity towards the others. When Christians love their

neighbors as themselves, they are acting like God and fulfilling the vocation of all Christians (Andreas 212). What separates one group from another concerning vocation is the specific manifestation of that calling. In every aspect of calling, ministerial or otherwise, a dimension exists where a person participates in the divine vocation regardless of church titles (Christopherson 220-22).

To be a pastor is to be called as a Christian to love God with one's heart and to love one's neighbor as oneself, accepting that God has asked one to do both in the realm of the church. For many clergy vocation proceeds as follows: Pastors are called to be children of God first, spouses second, parents third, and pastors fourth (Headley 57-60, 67-73). The various manifestations of vocation as pastor are intended to be integrated into the whole of pastoral life. However, sometimes the spheres of calling are at odds with each other. A husband or wife of a pastor will believe that their spouses' calling as a pastor is superseding the calling to the marital relationship. The conflict of spheres is known as boundary ambiguity or boundary incongruence and it affects clergy job satisfaction and marital satisfaction. In regards to pastoral termination, termination greatly affects the pastor's vocation because the very people the pastors were called to love wounded them and placed their calling as a spouse and parent at great risk. Finally, pastoral termination affects the vocation of loving God because the very God who gave the pastoral vocation and its expression allowed the pastors to be hurt by the people Christ called the pastor to serve. Still other issues have an impact on pastoral termination. The polity within which a clergy person is located determines how the termination proceeds and how termination is experienced.

Polity

The polity of a church greatly affects how a pastor will experience termination. Each church has a unique expression of its polity. It is difficult to predict how a particular structure will result in a specific course of termination. For example, the Episcopal Church in America and the United Methodist Church have an episcopal structure, but the Episcopal church has a diocese with a Bishop, while the Methodist Church has districts with district superintendents (DS). In both denominations the pastor is employed by the denomination not the church. In a termination scenario a member or a group will complain to the DS or the bishop and ask to have the pastor moved. In this situation a pastor is not *fired*, he or she is simply *moved*.

In the Episcopal church, once the bishop is summoned by a church in the midst of termination proceedings, he or she has the power to determine the source of the problem and either move the priest or discipline the congregation. In the United Methodist system, the DS is summoned to a congregation to determine the source of the conflict as well as the way to proceed. In the United Methodist system the frequent course of action is simply to move the pastor.

Another denomination that operates under an episcopal structure is the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA). In the ELCA, if a group in the congregation desires to remove the pastor, the group must approach the bishop of the synod and ask for the removal of the pastor. At such time, the bishop engages in the atmosphere of the congregation and decides whether to remove the pastor or not. If the bishop decides to remove the pastor, the church comes under the care of the bishop and operates under his or her direction until the bishop places a permanent pastor. The pastor

who has been removed is in a precarious position because the bishop who removed him or her is responsible for that individual's next placement. The termination scenario will likely cause strain on the relationship between the pastor and bishop, making further employment tenuous. The dynamic is true for denominations that use an episcopal structure.

The Presbyterian Church in the United States and the Presbyterian Church United States of America (PCUSA) have the same process for handling pastoral termination. In both denominations if a church desires to remove its pastor the congregation must first vote on his or her removal. After the affirmative congregational vote, the minister must concur. If the pastor does not concur with the vote, he or she must state his case before the presbytery. After considering both points of view the presbytery determines if the relationship between the pastor and congregation is to be dissolved (Gray and Tucker 75; Board of Christian Education 76-77).

The Assemblies of God have a unique structure in that the local congregation is autonomous. These churches may follow their own proceedings concerning termination; however, once they call in the area bishop, the bishop has total decision-making power. An Assemblies bishop has the power to remove the pastor and he may dissolve the congregation if the particular church has a history of fractured relationships with their pastor.

The United Church of Christ (UCC) is a denomination with a mild form of presbyterian governance. Even though the church calls, the conference ordains. In a termination scenario, the congregation votes on the pastor's resignation. Some UCC churches require a simple majority, and others require a super majority of 80 percent. In

any pastoral termination within the UCC, the conference minister cannot intercede unless invited by the congregation.

For churches that practice a free church polity, the number of ways to proceed with termination is reflected in the number of churches that exist. In some Southern Baptist churches and Congregational churches, a simple majority vote of the congregation is enough to terminate a pastor. In other free-church polities, the deacon board is able to make the decision to terminate the ministry relationship independent of the congregation. In both the Presbyterian and Congregational denominations, when pastors are fired from a church, they do not have another church awaiting their arrival. Both polity styles operate on a call not appointment system where a pastor must candidate for a position. Even though different polities produces different processes for termination, consideration must be given to the attributes that each termination scenario shares.

Pastoral Termination

A consistent termination story presents itself in the literature surrounding pastoral termination. A hurting person finds a way to get into a position of power in a church. Usually, the church has some weakness and needs all the volunteers it can get, making acquisition of power easy. The person will be a secretary, a wedding coordinator, custodian, deacon, board member, or benefactor. This person will slyly beguile people to create alliances. Then when the pastor calls the person on their behavior or opposes one of his or her pet projects, the person will marshal his or her forces against the pastor through lies, gossip, and innuendo. By now, the church is in a state of complete conflict, with members being forced to choose sides. At this point denominational officials are

called in. The official will enter the situation and apply conflict resolution training to solve the problem. The pastor is at a disadvantage because the person and his or her followers have been in contact with the denominational official long before the conflict became public. The denominational official wades into the conflict and soon finds that the pastor is not the issue, yet because the denominational official is afraid of losing the financial support of the congregation, the official acquiesces to the demands of the groups seeking the pastor's removal. In this action, a pastor is bewildered, frustrated, and considers leaving pastoral ministry because the very denominational leaders that called the pastor to fight for the flock abandoned him or her at the decisive moment (Chandler 4). At the same time, the church is now firmly placed in the hands of power brokers who are more interested in pulling strings than in God's desires for the church. These denominational actions all but assure that the next pastor will suffer the same fate as his or her predecessor. The frequency of the story in the life of Christ's church has become a great concern, prompting people to research pastoral termination from different angles.

Dissertations

For the last ten years, nine dissertations have researched the issue of pastoral termination in the church. The average of a dissertation a year seems to point to a trend regarding the seriousness of pastoral termination. Table 2.1 lists each dissertation and shows the type of research that was conducted.

Table 2.1. Dissertations Addressing Pastoral Termination

Author	Title	Date	Type
Thomas A. Powell	<i>Forced Terminations among Clergy: Causes and Recovery</i>	2008	No Standard Format
Raymond Larson	<i>Involuntary Termination among PCUSA Clergy</i>	2007	Unable to Access
Charles Richard Barbare	“A Decision Making Manual for Pastors to Aid in the Prevention of Forced Exits”	2006	Quantitative
Arthur Hunt	“I Never Expected <u>This</u> to Happen to <u>Me</u> : An Exploration of How Pastors in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church View the Impact of Their Own Forced Exits in Situations Other Than Moral Failure”	2006	Phenom.
Lauren W. Orchard	“Between Force Exit and Intentional Ministry Re-Entry”	2006	Mixed Methods
Jerry Duane Hall	“Multi-Case Study of Clergy Termination”	2004	Phenom
Robert A. Williamson	“Avoiding Forced Termination of Pastors: A Win/Win Possibility through Polarity Management of Conflict”	2003	Mixed Methods
Leslie Atkinson	<i>Congregational/Clergy Conflict and Involuntary Termination</i>	2001	Quantitative
D. Roy Dail	“A Study of Forced Exits among Pastors of the Western Pennsylvania District of the Christian and Missionary Alliance Churches”	1999	Quantitative

A brief overview of dissertations over the last ten years yields several trends.

First, of the nine dissertations, only one, done by Jerry Duane Hall, was a PhD dissertation. All of the rest were Doctor of Ministry (DMin) dissertations. A preliminary interpretation of the abundance of DMin dissertations addressing the subject of pastoral termination leads to the conclusion that termination is not an ancillary issue affecting pastors. The lack of dissertations addressing pastoral terminations conducted by people

who are seeking to become professional researchers and scholars creates the appearance that academia does not seem to realize the seriousness of this epidemic.

Second, out of all the dissertations, only two were qualitative studies. The remainder of the research used either mixed-methods approach, meaning a combination of survey and interview, or pure quantitative surveys. The paucity of qualitative studies illuminates the need for that type of research. One problem with the research being so heavily weighted on the quantitative side is that other types of knowledge are made inaccessible. Each method yields a specific type of result. If the body of literature is heavily weighted toward a particular research method, then the research is correspondingly lop-sided in terms of findings. Clearly, qualitative research could augment information on pastoral termination.

Third, most of the studies were geared toward a pre-intervention approach. The dissertations sought information to aid prevention or help pastors transition after a termination. The dissertations seem to suggest that termination can be prevented by implementing a particular technique. Additionally, when reading the various dissertations, the answers to the questionnaires and the chronologies began to take on an air of familiarity. Each person and situation was unique, yet they really were not. The likelihood of new insight gained in terms of how a termination happens is small. All the pre-intervention dissertations suggest the utilization of some skills would prevent forced terminations, and the number of pastoral terminations should shrink. However, the national trends regarding termination show the numbers are not shrinking.

Fourth, all of the dissertations, with the exception of Dr. Hall's, were denominationally focused because the researchers were of a particular denominational

grouping. The denominationally focused findings have limits because they can be dismissed with an appeal to denominational subculture. The abundance of denominational focus determined that my research be ecumenical in scope, focusing on a geographic region.

Fifth, the current research regarding pastoral termination is difficult to synthesize. Some qualitative researchers desire to have narrative literature reviews in dissertations. In these literature reviews, researchers synthesize previous studies. The current research makes synthesis a daunting task because no standard format is used in the dissertations that researched pastoral termination. Sometimes, the standard model for a five-chapter dissertation was not followed. One of the dissertations was hard to classify because it claimed a qualitative approach but did no text coding. With no text codes, the research had no legitimate cluster themes, making the conclusions difficult to audit. The interviews themselves were narrative in scope without any guidance by a research question/grand tour question. The inconsistencies between the dissertations cause one to question the validity of the findings in any one of them because the inconsistencies make drawing meta-conclusions difficult.

The final trend seen in the dissertations relates to the rest of the literature surrounding pastoral termination. If pastors or denominational officials want to research pastoral termination, they would have great difficulty doing so. The current literature surrounding pastoral termination is scant in its appearance in journals or books. The bulk of the information on pastoral termination is in dissertations. Local pastors and congregations are unlikely to seek information not easily available.

Pastoral Termination by the Numbers

The first source for the statistical information surrounding pastoral termination is LaRue with *Christianity Today*. LaRue researches and writes on the issue of pastoral termination and is the primary source for the statistical data surrounding pastoral termination. Other sources confirm LaRue's findings. Focus on the Family conducted a survey of pastors through their Parsonage Ministry. The survey contains a section on pastoral terminations, and its numbers agreed with LaRue's numbers. The only other group conducting ongoing research in the area of pastoral termination is Pastor in Residence. In 2007, Pastor in Residence conducted a survey of pastors who had experienced pastoral termination (Barfoot, Winston, and Wickman). Outside of those three, the only major piece of research on this issue was a study done by Hoge and Wenger as a part of the Pulpit and Pew research of Duke Divinity School. Table 2.2. compares various studies for causes of pastoral termination.

Table 2.2. Reasons for Pastoral Termination

“Avoiding Terminal Mistakes” Reif	“The Development of a Series of Workshops to Deal With Issues Relating to Pastoral Termination” Johnson	“A Multi-Case Study of Clergy Termination” Hall
1. Unrealistic expectations of the pastor by the church	1. Role conflict and role confusion	1. Conflict with board member/s or other church members
2. Resistance to change	2. Pastoral leadership style	2. Contentious Individuals and power groups
3. Financial problems	3. Conflict and stress management	3. Conflicting visions of the church
4. Lack of vision	4. Integrity in relationship	4. Personality clashes between clergy, board members, and congregation
5. Perception of pastor as <i>hired hand</i> of the congregation	5. Need for personal support system	5. Power struggles between clergy and board members
6. Lay leader who seek to control church and pastor	6. Lay leader who seek to control church and pastor	6. Mismatch between clergy and board members regarding direction/ministries of the church
7. Lack of communication	7. Lack of communication	7. Personal leadership style of the pastor
8. Maintain status quo	8. Maintain status quo	8. Relationship breakdown between pastor and board members
9. Compare current pastor to previous pastor	9. Compare current pastor to previous pastor	9. Unrealistic expectations upon the pastor
10. Lack of commitment by laity to ministry	10. Lack of commitment by laity to ministry	10. No church discipline
11. Spiritual inadequacy	11. Spiritual inadequacy	
“A Decision Making Manual for Pastors to Aid in the Prevention of Forced Exits” Barbare	“Forced Pastoral Exits: An Exploratory Study” Barfoot, Winston, Wickman	<i>Congregational/Clergy Conflict and Involuntary Termination</i> Atkinson
1. Conflict	1. Conflicting visions for the church	1. Differing expectations
2. Mismatch with the congregation	2. Personality conflicts with other in leadership and/or congregation	2. Differing visions
3. Burnout	3. Interpersonal incompetence	3. Perceived threats to church’s self-image
4. Unhealthy church culture	4. Unrealistic expectations	4. Issues of power, control, and exercised authority
5. Impairment due to physical health or age	5. Lack of church discipline and procedures	5. Significant personality differences
6. Pastoral incompetence	6. Contentious individuals and power groups	
7. Moral failure		

Plethoras of factors that contribute to conflict rising to the level of a termination within a congregation exist. When comparing the research on pastoral termination,

several themes emerge. The interplay of the issues leads to termination. The first significant issue contributing to termination is role conflict.

Role conflict. An examination of clergy stress research reveals that researchers today are focusing on the issue of role ambiguity as a source of stress for the pastor and conflict within the congregation. Role ambiguity leads to stress experienced by the pastor, which, in turn, encourages conflict between pastor and congregation, which, in turn, will lead to a termination if not addressed. However, a study has shown that clergy role stress is not a matter of role ambiguity. Rather, pastor satisfaction was shown to result when role conflict was low and role ambiguity was high (Kemery 561-66). Pastors do not have an issue with role ambiguity, just the opposite. Pastors do well in the ambiguity associated with parish ministry. Research has shown that people with higher levels of education experience greater levels of role ambiguity (Monahan 83). Churches and denominations require clergy to have a master's level education. That requirement plus the nature of parish ministry ensures that pastors will experience elevated levels of role ambiguity. The key component to pastoral satisfaction, and the mutuality of the pastor/congregation relationship, is role conflict not role ambiguity. A direct corollary between role conflict, congregational/pastor conflict, and the probability that the conflict will end in termination exists.

Role conflict is a large component of both clergy/congregation conflict and pastoral termination (Dittes 73; Hoge and Wenger 78). Role conflict does not necessarily result from unstated expectations of the pastor or congregation. Role conflict results when expectations are known and are in conflict with one another (Monahan 83). When Barbare speaks of congregational mismatch and when D. Scott Barfoot, Bruce Winston

and Charles Wickman speak of conflicting visions of the church they are describing various manifestations of role conflict. The practical outworking of role conflict is seen when a pastor's vision of the church is different from that of the formal and informal lay leadership. Many different models of church exist, and each comes with its own set of assumptions. Each model attempts to answer the question, "What is the church supposed to be and what is it supposed to do?" Some models encourage churches to be a social club; others seek to create communities of the redeemed. Some models encourage the pastor to focus his or her attention on visiting the flock, while other models believe the pastor should be focused on bringing in the unchurched. Pastors and congregations have both articulated and unstated convictions regarding the purpose and function of a church. If the pastor's and congregation's expectations differ from each other, conflict will arise, making the pastor more susceptible to termination.

Role conflict is not only seen in the area of church vision, role conflict is also seen in the area of power and authority. The conflict over vision accompanies the issue of conflict over power. Some churches desire a pastor who is a chaplain figure and remains passive as the laity makes the decisions of the church. Other churches want the pastor to be the spiritual leader of the church charged with final authority on every issue. Pastors and churches often engage in a struggle over power because of stated and unstated assumptions about power in Christ's church. Jackson Carroll did an analysis of four different types of pastoral leadership style (135). Comparing these styles against each other, the pastor that takes charge and expects the laity to follow his or her lead brings the most conflict into the church. The runner-up leadership style for creating conflict was the one in which the lay folks made most of the decisions (140). Either extreme on the

leadership scale creates the role conflict in a congregation. Role conflict is reduced when pastor and laity agree upon a balance with decision-making and power. If a congregation and pastor cannot reach agreement and reduce the role conflict over expectations regarding vision and power, the probability of a termination increases.

Boundary ambiguity/boundary incongruence. A sub-set of role conflict is work/home conflict (Kreiner, Hollensbe, and Sheep 705):

Recall that work-home conflict is a generalized state and a subset of role conflict that results from the incompatibilities between role expectations and the consequences of such incompatibilities...Our data suggests a linkage between work-home boundary incongruence and work-home conflict. (714)

Work/home issues result from what is often referred to as *boundary ambiguity* or *boundary incongruence* (Lee, "Specifying Intrusive Demands" 479). On a practical level, role-conflict manifests itself in the life of the clergy person in his or her family when the expectations about the boundaries between church and home differ from that of the congregation. When a member of the church believes that he or she has the right to invade the pastor's home life anytime, the boundary violation creates conflict. When the pastor sets boundaries that are too rigid for the congregation, conflict will result. If the pastor's spouse believes that the work/home boundary is not respected, his or her perception creates conflict at home, which spills over into the congregation. This area of pastor/congregation relationships is referred to as *intrusive demands*.

Intrusive demands are a piece of boundary incongruence. Intrusive demands exist when the expectations about boundaries differ between pastor and congregation. Intrusive demands place stress upon the clergy family (Lee, "Specifying Intrusive Demands" 478-479; Morris and Blanton 37-38). Intrusive demands can be anything from the expectation

a congregation places on the pastor's children to phone calls during a meal or at any time in the evening (Tomic, Tomic, and Evers 230). Role conflict, boundary ambiguity, and intrusive demands all contribute to pastoral termination. If a pastor believes that his or her family space has been invaded, he or she is likely to respond with defensiveness, aggression, passive/aggressive behavior, or conflict avoidance. These behaviors over time will augment a conflicted situation, increasing the likelihood of a termination. Another contributing factor is the clergy spouse. Consideration of role conflict, boundary ambiguity, and intrusive demands upon the life of the clergy spouse need to be brought to bear concerning pastoral termination.

The narcissistic society. The American society is now characterized as a highly narcissistic culture. This statement is validated by the number of popular culture articles assessing and describing America as a burgeoning society of narcissists (Brundidge 23; Jayson; Kelley; Yoffe). Just as the pop-culture writers are noticing this alarming trend, other professionals such as Sandy Hotchkiss and Les Cater have devoted much of their lives to studying the cultural epidemic of narcissism. Another author, Jean M. Twenge notes that the newest generation entering the work force is named "Generation Me." According to many writers, Generation Me is a product of the first generation of narcissists, the boomers. However, Generation Me is creating major complications for employers in that items that motivated previous generations, such as better salary and the opportunity to keep their job, do not motivate Generation Me. Rather, Generation Me believes that they are entitled to a job and high salary upon graduation from college. Employers must now develop "praise programs" as a means of motivating Generation Me to do the job for which they were hired (862-77). Table 2.3 compares the *Diagnostic and*

Statistical Manual IV (DSM-IV-TR) clinical description of a narcissist with Carter's and Hotchkiss' description of a narcissist (American Psychiatric Association 661).

Table 2.3. Personality Characteristics of a Narcissist

<i>301.81 NPD DSM-IV-TR</i>	<i>Why Is It Always about You Hotchkiss</i>	<i>Enough about You, Let's Talk about Me Carter</i>
1. Has grandiose sense of self-importance	1. Shamelessness	1. Inability to empathize
2. Preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success	2. Magical thinking	2. Exploitive behavior
3. Believes he or she is <i>special</i> and unique and is understood by like people or institutions	3. Arrogance	3. Entitlement
4. Requires excessive admiration	4. Envy	4. Inability to receive direction
5. Has a sense of entitlement, expects favorable treatment	5. Entitlement	5. Insatiable need for control
6. Interpersonally exploitive	6. Exploitation	6. Haughty spirit
7. Lacks empathy	7. Bad boundaries	7. Unwillingness to acknowledge reality
8. Is often envious of others		8. Ability to create a favorable impression
9. Shows arrogant behavior		

The list of narcissistic characteristics is important because the behavior of narcissists contribute to role conflict and boundary ambiguity. The specific traits of a narcissist that are of major importance are self-image of specialness, entitlement, exploitive behavior, bad boundaries, and the need for control. Role conflict results from differing unstated expectations of a narcissist against another person. Out of feelings of uniqueness the narcissist will manipulate to gain and maintain his or her expectation. When a narcissist has conflict with a pastor who is unwilling to yield and does not recognize the narcissist's entitlement to power, the pastor's non-compliance will illicit

feelings of shame in the narcissistic parishoner. Because the narcissist is shame intolerant, he or she will need to scapegoat and attack the source of their shame—the pastor who does not recognize special right to control.

Concerning work-home conflict/intrusive demands, a narcissist can cause a great deal of conflict in the clergy home. A pastor could set up a boundary, and the narcissist will believe that the boundary exists for everyone else. Narcissists believe they are entitled to violate the work-home boundary at will. If a pastor confronts a narcissist on the boundary violation, the shame intolerance will lead to shame dumping and scapegoating behavior.

Three seminal works address the burgeoning epidemic of pastoral termination as a result of narcissistic personality in the church: *Antagonists in the Church* by Kenneth Haughk, *Clergy Killers* by G. Lloyd Rediger, and *The Wounded Minister* by Guy Greenfield. Without use of the words *role conflict* or *boundary incongruence*, each book describe situations in which termination took place because of a narcissist's involvement in role conflict and boundary incongruity.

The scenarios represent a real problem for American clergy. In *People of the Lie*, M. Scott Peck says that narcissists are attracted to religious institutions because of the subterfuge they provide (76-77). If narcissists are attracted to churches, and if the percentage of Americans that can be classified as narcissistic is growing, then the church will be overrun with narcissists. If the church is full of personalities who believe that they are entitled to control the pastor, then the number of instances of conflict as a result of role conflict and intrusive demands will only increase. Proportionally, the number of pastoral terminations will increase.

The narcissistic pastor. The discussion thus far has considered narcissists in the pew and not the pulpit. The only research conducted on narcissism in the church involves the pastor as narcissist. Greenfield, Haugk, and Rediger discuss the problems of narcissism in pastors and the destruction that they cause in churches. Despite such discussions, each author has an unstated position that the balance of toxic conflict leading to pastoral termination is caused by narcissistic parishioners. Two authors who reside outside of the United States have conducted research concerning narcissistic pastors. The first is Hessel J. Zondag. Zondag's writings focus on the question of whether the pastorate attracts narcissistic personalities or not. At times the pastorate offers an environment where pastors can receive adulation and devotion from the parishioners. Such an environment would be very attractive to a narcissist:

Narcissists' unrealistic expectations are often accompanied by optimistic illusions and inaccurate perceptions of the world and their own abilities (Farwell & Wohlwend-Lloyd, 1998). They have an exaggerated idea of their own abilities and excessive faith in the controllability of the future, and they fail to realize just how intractable reality can be. ("Narcissism and Motivation" 232)

However, narcissists do not like to associate with weak or broken people. This reality would make pastoral ministry very unattractive to a narcissist. Zondag concludes that while the pastorate is a wonderfully attractive place for the narcissist to flourish, the requirement to associate with people who are *less than* would also make the pastorate unattractive for a narcissist. Zondag further states that the number of narcissistic pastors is not irregular when compared with other occupations ("Just Like Other People" 428). The second author is not so generous.

Shin Hwan Pan examines narcissism among pastors in Korea. Pan asserts a preponderance of narcissism exists in Korean seminaries. Pan believes that pastors

exhibit narcissistic traits when they desire awards, degrees, prestige, and larger congregations. Pan believes that narcissistic tendencies in pastors lead to burnout when their ambitions go unrealized. The issue of narcissism within the clergy is an important one. When considering the rash of sexual misconduct accusations and embezzlement cases, narcissism plays a major component in such evil. The church can benefit from more research in this area.

If a pastor is the narcissist, then the examples of narcissism and role conflict and boundary incongruence are the same only in reverse. With a narcissistic pastor, role conflict exists because of the pastor's need to control, exploitive behavior is leveraged to get power, and because a narcissistic pastor believes he or she is special he or she is justified by the deleterious actions taken. In terms of boundary incongruence, the sacred role of the pastor could easily allow a narcissist to rationalize major boundary violations in the lives of the congregation.

The issue of narcissism is worthy of mentioning for this study. The study does not attempt to identify the level of narcissism in the participants or in the congregation they served. However, the socio-economic demographics of the county of study are such that with the great amount of wealth, is an attitude of entitlement (See Table 2.3). The entitlement of inhabitants of the county infiltrates the church such that parishioners and pastors have the capacity for a belief that they are unique and special. If a pastor feels entitled, that feeling will have deleterious effects on his or her ministry. The entitled pastor will exhibit a number of destructive behaviors if his or her wishes go unfulfilled. The same emotional behavior is true for the members of the congregation. For the pastor the theological image of the Jesus as the Good Shepherd is critical for ministerial

function because Jesus does not act in a selfish manner. Jesus does not cling to his entitlement as God but empties himself and selflessly lays down his life for the sheep.

Clergy Spouses

In the pastoral termination scenario, a paucity of literature addressing the spouse's experience of pastoral termination exists. For married pastors, the call to ordained ministry is a shared experience. Individuals married to pastors often share in the burden and effort necessary to shepherd God's people. Clergy spouses do indeed have to bear their spouses' calling (Somerville 31). The life of pastors' spouses is strange. The spouses usually hold an honored spot in the congregation, yet they have no political power. Clergy spouses are aware of the subterfuge going on in the congregation yet are powerless to do or say anything about it. Additionally, clergy spouses have to walk a strange path in that they must support their spouses who are the leaders and, if they have children, parent them in such a way that the children do not have consternation toward God and his church (Button). The difficult position of a clergy spouse is compounded by the fact that his or her pastor is the spouse. Finding spiritual guidance from a person one sees every day is challenging. The clergy spouse is under a great deal of pressure from the family and the congregation. The level of pressure endured by clergy spouses could lead to burnout symptoms for the spouse not the pastor. With all the pressures and strains on clergy families and spouses, factoring in family systems, which describes the crucial role a healthy clergy families play in bringing health to a congregation, one would think ample literature exists to help clergy spouses navigate the emotionally difficult waters of a congregation.

In researching the literature regarding clergy spouses over a ten-year span (1999-2009), I found four sources. Only two books and two articles discuss the life of a pastor's wife; none addressed the perspective of a male spouse. A research article entitled "Patterns of Stress and Support among Adventist Clergy by Cameron Lee says the following:

Studies of clergy stress have addressed the demands made by ministry environment on the minister's personal and family life. Most of the research has been conducted using individual responses of male pastors. Comparatively little empirical research has been done with pastor's wives, and still less where both husbands' and wives' responses are matched and compared.

Since William Douglas' major study of pastor's wives in 1965, *there has not been another of similar scope* [emphasis mine]. (761, 763)

The article goes on to say that the pastor has more support from the denominational structures than the spouse, the clergy spouse has to draw from family resources for support. Lee concludes that clergy spouses do not have the support structure available to them that their husband or wife has. No person is more crucial to the health of the entire family system (congregation, pastor's family, and individual church families) than the clergy spouse, yet a scant level of writing about and for this population exists (Friedman 8, 279). Great attention is paid to *healthy churches*. Still, the most important person is overlooked.

The issue of pastoral termination vividly illustrates the stress and strains on a clergy family as well as the lack of resources available to them (Blosch 101-10). In a termination situation, the congregation has power to act, the cadre leading the termination has power to shape events, denominational officials have decision-making power, and even the pastor has power to make choices that influence events. The pastor's spouse must be supportive of the pastor, protect their children, and remain silent as people attack

the character of the beloved one (Chandler 3). In most termination episodes, the group seeking the pastor's removal will level accusations, innuendos, and slander against the pastor's spouse (Greenfield 97-113; King 198). The lack of literature addressing clergy spouse issues is why I determined to interview the clergy spouses.

Ministry to Terminated Pastors

A final area of literature regarding pastoral termination surrounds the ministries for terminated pastors. A brief Web search on such ministry yields many options; however, only two seem to have legitimacy and permanency. The first ministry worth mentioning is Ministering to Ministers (MTM). MTM is a legitimate foundation that offers wellness retreats for clergy and spouses, mentoring for pastors in crisis, publications with articles addressing pastoral termination issues, and various online documents to help pastors with call issues such as salary, severance, and terms of call. The next organization is Pastor-in-Residence ministry (PIR). PIR has a ministry specifically directed to pastors in crisis with an eye toward helping them during the transition after a termination. The dissertation by Orchard addresses such an issue; however, PIR has been active for several decades. Charles Wickman started PIR in the 1980s as a part of his DMin dissertation. PIR seeks to have congregations become "refuge churches" where pastors and their families can go after a termination. The church will offer the pastoral family a salary and ministry opportunities while the family regroups. The refuge church is an attempt to heal and retool a wounded shepherd. Both MTM and PIR are ministries that play a crucial role in the body of Christ. Like most nonprofit organizations, their biggest need is financial.

Qualitative Phenomenological Methodology

Qualitative research is an approach that allows the social sciences to engage in studies that explore a participant's lived experience. A qualitative researcher understands that each person is an *expert* in his or her own experience. A subset of research within the qualitative field is phenomenological research.

Phenomenological Research

The classic understanding of phenomenological research is that it grounds the researcher in the life world of the participants. This life world, or lived experience, is the starting point of knowledge for qualitative research, and phenomenology is one way of uncovering this knowledge (Engel). Phenomenological research allows researchers to “recollect our own experiences, and to empathetically enter and reflect on the lived world of other persons in order to apprehend the meaning of the world as they are given to the first-person point of view” (Wertz 168). The entering into the world of another is achieved through something called “phenomenological reflection.” Phenomenological reflection is guided by four existential realities; those realities are time, space, body, and community. These four components allow the researcher to enter into Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger's “lived experience” (Morse and Richards 44). Phenomenological studies do not seek to create new knowledge; rather, they heighten one's awareness of another's experience.

Phenomenological research has four distinct core characteristics: (1), the research is descriptive; (2) the researcher performs a phenomenological reduction, which is done by finding cluster themes; (3) the researcher must investigate the intentional relationship

between person and situations; and, (4) the research provides knowledge of psychological essences (Wertz 170).

In order to achieve these four goals, four steps must be taken. First, a researcher must perform a reading of the entire subject in order to grasp a sense of the whole. Second, the researcher rereads the descriptions and looks for shifts in meaning. Third, the researcher reflects on every meaning unit to discern what it reveals about the phenomena being investigated. Fourth, the researcher synthesizes these reflections and insights into a consistent statement.

Qualitative research requires every descriptive statement be accounted for and available for public scrutiny. The accountability allows researchers to test for validity (Wertz 170). These steps allow the phenomenological researcher to bracket his or her presuppositions because they place a high value on description. The phenomenological researcher travels a journey of engagement, immersion, incubation, explication, and synthesis concerning the subject matter (Morse and Richards 48). Phenomenological research describes a journey by the researcher in which clarity and insight are gained only as one goes through the research process.

A final important piece to phenomenological research is that of the “double hermeneutic” (Weed, “A Potential Method” 39). The double hermeneutic is the recognition that the researcher is located within the research dialogue. Based on the postmodern epistemological understanding of the canard of the *unbiased observer*, the interviewer uses the double hermeneutic to get an insider’s perspective into the research dialogue. To be fully engaged in the interview, the researcher must be aware that the participant is interpreting his or her experience for the researcher, and the researcher is, in

turn, interpreting the participant's experience through his or her own life story. The interview process recognizes that the person conducting the study will apply his or her own meaning to the interview. Phenomenological research does not shy away from the fact that a researcher is involved in *meaning making* with the interviews that they conduct (Hollway and Jefferson 11).

Dynamics of Interviews

One of the strengths of phenomenological research is the means by which data is gathered. The use of a face-to-face interview, whether the participants are in the same room or speaking via the Internet, allows the interviewer to witness values, attitudes, and assumptions communicated through body language. These social cues allow the interviewer immediately to test whether or not the interviewee is being truthful and honest. The negative side of this synchronous communication of time and place is that the interviewer can *coach* the responses by using his or her body language. Focusing on the questions and not the answers can help the interviewer avoid this temptation. A recording device allows the interviewer freedom from worry about missing data because he or she can go back and review it (Opdenakker 3). The phenomenological interview has been described as a "partnership" or "communicative performance event," a conversational research journey with its own rules (Hesser-Biber and Leavy 187). The mutualistic nature of interviews creates a space where the participant's telling of story can have great redemptive possibilities.

Phenomenological interviews have a healing potential inherent within them. The very process of interviews is a liberating pedagogy that allows the oppressed to give voice to their experience and thus gain power over whatever oppresses them simply by

naming it. Giving voice to an experience allows the subjects to discover themselves and their own history. Face-to-face interviews have the potential to humanize and empower both the interviewer and the participant (Jurema, Pimentel, Cordeiro, and Nepomunceno 19). Face-to-face interviews allow the researcher to enter into the lived experience of the participants and to illuminate their world for everyone else.

Qualitative Synthesis and *Meta-Interpretation*

Recently, concern has grown over the issue of synthesis surrounding qualitative inquiry. The concern over synthesis is specifically focused on literature reviews in qualitative research. The intent of the literature review is for the researcher to gain a depth and breadth of the subject matter and from there determine the direction of the study. The complaint, however, is that most literature reviews in qualitative inquiry are nothing more than annotated bibliographies that are not a balanced view of the field and lack any evaluation on the part of the researcher (Weed, “Meta-Interpretation” 14). Some believe that most literature reviews have functioned as a “context setting justifying prelude” to primary research because the researchers have determined the research they want to do before the literature review has begun (15). This critique, however, is not universally held. John Creswell argues that the literature reviews in a qualitative study should play a less substantial role than its counterpart in quantitative research. Creswell goes on to say that a person may use the literature review as a means to justify the research but that it does not need to provide a major direction for the research questions (46). For those who do not agree with Creswell, an alternative possibility exists.

To address a *proof-text* literature review researchers have proposed “meta-interpretation” as a way of synthesizing literature reviews and other studies on any given

subject matter (Weed , “A Potential Method” 20). An approach called interpretive phenomenological analysis, which is a process that enables the researcher to synthesize studies and literature reviews in a way in which the objectivity of the researcher can be scrutinized with an audit trail. Because the researcher is involved in meaning making, he or she assigns themes to the literature itself. The audit trail is a means by which the researcher is held accountable for the themes synthesized in a literature review. Plainly said, some researchers desire to apply the steps in a phenomenological study to literature reviews themselves. Regardless of whether or not a researcher engages in interpretive phenomenological analysis, a call for synthesis requires the researcher to engage in analysis of the material under consideration.

Summary

The literature surrounding the forced terminations of pastors is scant. The lack of pastoral termination literature is unfortunate because the statistical data and societal trends all point to an increase of pastoral termination in the church. To bolster the research in this area, I have explored recent dissertations that dealt with the issue of pastoral termination, current literature on pastoral termination, literature addressing role conflict and boundary incongruity, literature addressing the epidemic of narcissism in the United States as it relates to the church, literature surrounding issues faced by clergy spouses, and the current literature on qualitative phenomenological research. The review of the literature has directed me to research specific areas of this phenomenon. I believe a need exists to explore how pastors and their spouses who have experienced pastoral termination interpret their experience. I believe a need exists to explore the impact the event had on the pastors’ and spouses’ beliefs about God exists and how the experience

has changed how they live. I believe a need exists to explore the effect termination had on clergy relationships. Chapter 3 describes the research method providing a framework for the interviews and the process for their interpretation.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Problem and Purpose

The problem of pastoral termination is an issue that affects many churches and pastors in the United States. An earlier cited statistic determined that 23 percent of pastors would experience termination at some point in their ministry careers. I have designed a qualitative phenomenological study to explore how pastors and their spouses who have experienced pastoral termination explain the trauma theologically, explore how pastoral termination has affected their beliefs and they live, and explore how termination has affected their relationships. The phenomenological study allowed me to enter into the lived world of the participants and understand clergy termination from their experience.

I focused my research on a particular county located in north Texas. By focusing on a geographic area, I could examine the issue from an ecumenical perspective. The study was not limited to church size, polity, or worship style. Most of the research into this issue prior to this study was denominationally oriented.

The purpose of this study was to explore the phenomenon of clergy termination from the perspective of pastors and clergy spouses who have experienced termination.

Research Questions and/or Hypotheses

To formulate the following questions, I synthesized several sources. The first source was an examination of research questions from previous dissertations over the past ten years in which I looked for gaps and areas not studied. Next, an analysis of the literature was conducted for current issues concerning pastoral termination. Finally, I interviewed Dr. Charles Wickman, founder and president of Pastor-in-Residence, a

ministry that specifically ministers to pastors who have gone through a termination experience. I interviewed Rev. Ed Lochmoeller who is the national director of PIR, and I interviewed the Rev. Dr. W. Michael Chittum, chair of the Board of Directors for Ministering to Ministers, another ministry to pastors who are in or have gone through a termination crisis. With these three men, I asked them this question: “If you were in my shoes and could ask these participants any question, what would you ask them?” The three sources of information; dissertations, current literature, and interviews with experts ministering to terminated pastors, all led to a synthesis that sought to address the gaps in the previous research.

My study included a new dimension— the issue of clergy termination from the perspective of the spouse. In the dissertation by Arthur Hunt, he asked a question of the participants regarding how the spouse was impacted by the termination (150). While this question was reasonable, the answer to it was filtered through the clergy person’s perception of how his or her spouse handled the experience. Much can be learned by exploring the issue of clergy termination from the perspective of the spouse (Hall 173-74). By giving voice to a person who is normally silent, inclusion of the spouse could lead to greater understanding of the phenomena and offer insight on how to help clergy families going through the crisis and help those seeking healing after the event

The three research questions are also undergirded by a conviction that what a person thinks, theology, directly affects and influences what a person believes about God, faith, which in turn directly impacts how a person lives. Theology, faith, and life ultimately affect the day-to-day decisions of a person’s behavior, which is understood as Christian praxis (Peterson 5-6). To suggest that these realities are separate for a Christian

and a pastor is to impose a bifurcation within the person that God never intended (McGrath 13, 27, 33). How these pastors and their wives conceptualized God directly affected how they believed God would, or would not, work in their ministry and family lives, and it affected how they interacted with their families and their parishioners before and during termination. A reasonable person understands that a trauma such as termination would affect the pastors' and spouses' conceptual framework of God, belief about God, how they currently live because of this shift, and the impact of termination upon relationships. The three research questions attempted to maintain the integrity of holistic Christian reality.

Research Question #1

How do these pastors and spouses interpret their termination experience theologically?

Research question #1 is important because an abundance of literature on conflict resolution exists within the pastoral reference materials. Much of this writing is geared toward prevention of major conflict in the church rising to the level of a termination or a church split. The previous literature did not explore pastoral termination from the theological perspective of the terminated clergy. Pastors are taught in seminary to *think theologically*. One of the roles that a local church pastor assumes upon ordination is that of the *theologian in residence*. Pastors are expected to view life through a theological lens. That capacity includes an ability to view pastoral termination from a theological perspective. I wanted to know if pastors who have been terminated from their positions had a larger framework from which to view, analyze, and interpret what has happened to

them. If the pastors do have a theological framework, I want know what termination has taught them about who and what they are as Christ's shepherds.

The nature of the pastoral calling involves the entire person; therefore, the spouses of pastors are engaged in theological reflection whether he or she is aware of it or not. Spouses of pastors have a theological framework even if it goes unarticulated. The theological framework that clergy spouses use to grapple with the trauma of the termination of their spouse is worthy of exploration.

The semi-structured interview protocol provides two specific sub-questions used to answer the main research question (See Appendix A). By examining all of the participants' responses, coding them, and locating shared cluster themes, I was able to answer this research question.

Research Question #2

How has the termination experience affected these pastors' and spouses' beliefs?

The rationale behind this question seeks to illuminate how the crisis and trauma of a termination affects the faith life of a pastor. Pastoral ordination requires the pastor to live in dynamic tension because ordination is grounded in the reality that the pastor is part of the people of God as a Christian and yet separate from them as a leader. Pastors are called to lead and shepherd God's people. Their capacity to perform this task is directly related to the vitality of their personal faith. If pastors have weak faith lives, they will have weak ministries. The converse of this statement is also true. The pastor must walk a fine line between disciple and leader. Pastoral termination affects previously held convictions about God, and it affects how these pastors interact with God because of the terminations. If the call of discipleship is to love God and love people, I wanted to

explore how termination affects the pastors' capacity to do both. Research Question #2 explores this dynamic.

As with the previous questions, the pastor's spouse has beliefs about God, faith, and life. The trauma of a termination experience could have an impact on all of these for the spouse. I wanted to explore the shift in belief because of the termination experience.

The semi-structured interview protocol provides two specific sub-questions for this research question (See Appendix A). By examining all of the participants' responses, coding them, and locating shared cluster themes, I was able to answer this research question.

Research Question #3

How has the termination experience affected the pastors' and spouses' way of life?

If the pastors and spouses have a framework and the framework supports a system of beliefs that determines how a human being lives his or her life, then a traumatic event could cause a shift in how the person conceptualizes the world. If this shift happens, the beliefs systems that are supported by the conceptual framework will change as well. Once the beliefs change, then the manner in which individuals conduct their lives, the way they behave, the manner in which they interact with family members, other people, and their world will change. Research Question 3 attempted to illuminate the shift.

The semi-structured interview protocol provides three specific sub-questions for this research question (see Appendix A). By examining all of the participants' responses, coding them, and locating shared cluster themes, I was able to answer this research question.

Population and Participants

The population of this study included the pastors and spouses from a particular county in north Texas who have experienced pastoral termination. The population covers a range of denominations, church sizes, worship styles, and polity structures. The participants were selected using two distinct methods. The first method resulted from selecting pastors in the area that I knew or whose story of termination was made known to me. I contacted all possible candidates to see if they were willing to participate in this study. The contacts may be categorized two ways. First, I contacted pastors who had been removed from their churches. Four out of seven pastors in the group agreed to be interviewed. Three pastors did not agree to be interviewed, and of those three, one pastor declined to be interviewed at initial contact. The pastor who declined to be interviewed was four years removed from the experience of termination by the church he founded. The pastor explained to me that he and his wife had *moved on* and did not want to open that painful chapter in his life. Two other pastors agreed to be interviewed at the initial contact; however, when I arranged the interviews, both pastors chose not participate in the study. The passivity of the two pastors could be attributed to the chronological nearness of the termination event. At the time of contact, both pastors were two years removed from their experience of termination. Additionally, if the passive/avoidance communication style was the pastors' main method of interaction when vexing issues arise, then the implications of passive/avoidance communication is that a congregation could become weary of that style of communication and seek his or her removal.

The second group of pastors was a sizeable group who said that they were not fired from their churches and were convinced that at no time had termination been

mentioned. Engaging pastors who operate at a high level of cognitive dissonance is difficult (Tavris and Aronson 13, 70-71). In one instance, a pastor shared that one of the governing boards of the church brought a three-page letter of complaints six months after his arrival. When I asked him if his resignation was discussed as these complaints were brought forward, he said none of the complainers broached the subject of his leaving. A conflicted situation between a pastor and a board usually involves the subject of termination on some level within the discussion. I am not the only researcher to encounter this phenomenon. Hunt found the same reality when he was conducting his research (90). This study is not about issues of cognitive dissonance in pastoral terminations; however, cognitive dissonance issues with clergy is worthy of exploration. Only one pastor admitted that had he remained as pastor, the situation would have become intractable and a vote would have been taken.

The second method I used to procure participants for this study was to send out a letter to area denominational officials (see Appendix C). I asked them to place me in contact with pastors who had been terminated while serving in the area denominational structures. Of the thirteen denominational officials contacted, only five responded to my letter. Out of the five responses, only one official provided a possible candidate. I contacted this pastor and discovered that he had experienced termination and was living in the county of study, but the termination took place in a county other than the one under study.

Design of the Study

I designed this study to explore the phenomena of clergy terminations in a particular county in north Texas. I used qualitative research to accomplish this task.

Qualitative research is an excellent vehicle to address emotional topics. In 2008, Gerald-Mark Breen conducted a qualitative inquiry into the factors that contribute to conflict among Southern Baptist pastors. This study was an ethnography not a phenomenological inquiry; however, ethnography as a qualitative tool illustrates that qualitative research can be used in researching sensitive issues. The nature of qualitative research is that it creates a space where researcher and participants can forge bonds of trust that allow an exploration of issues without violating confidentiality. For my study, I chose phenomenological research because it allowed the opportunity to enter the lives of the participants and look for ideas, beliefs, and experiences common to all clergy terminations.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation for this study was a researcher-designed, semi-structured interview. The interview questions were crafted from the research questions. I constructed the research questions from four primary sources. I considered the types of research previously conducted surrounding clergy termination and the current literature addressing pastoral termination. I contacted three people who specifically minister to pastors in crisis or post-crisis and asked them for questions to ask the participants. Then I met with my research reflection team, and, together, we constructed a rough draft of the questions. These questions were honed through discussion with my mentor.

Variables

The intervening variable was the polity structures of the participants. The differing polity could have an impact on the participants' experience of termination.

Reliability and Validity

The validity of the study was verified using the process of member checking (Creswell 252). I had two of the participants read the transcripts of the interviews to check for accuracy. I asked a pastor and a spouse whether the themes were accurate and if the interpretations were fair. Each person said that the transcripts were accurate and that the conclusions were within the scope of their understanding of the interviews. Inter-rater reliability of the study was checked by assigning two independent raters to analyze the transcripts to validate my conclusions on the study themes. An over-arching assessment was provided by a rater:

The methodology was consistent; the interviewer kept interviewees on task; the matrix accurately portrayed the content and spirit of the answers to the questions. The broadness of experience made that difficult, but the researcher did a good job of comparison, contrast and summary both vertically and horizontally; so the accuracy has a good check in place that is visible to the reviewer. The conclusions are reasonable based upon the data answers gathered and chosen format. The researcher acknowledges the psychological factors that emerge but limits his interpretation of them within theological and ecclesiastical contextualized expressions of thought and behavior. The researcher avoids submerging relevant responses without taking the concentrated theme hostage.

The second rater offered another assessment of the reliability of the study, “Upon reviewing all of the submitted materials I concluded that the findings of the research are consistent with the perspectives conveyed in the submitted transcripts.” Both raters found internal reliability between the conclusions and the data.

Data Collection

To collect the data for this study, terminated pastors were contacted as to their willingness to participate in the study. After the pastors and spouses agreed to the interview a time was scheduled for their interviews. Candidates were interviewed in their

homes so that they would not feel threatened as they divulged emotional issues. The location choice was applicable for the face-to-face interviews, as well as the interviews conducted via video conferencing on the Internet. At the beginning of the interview, the pastor and the spouse, when applicable, signed the release form. At that point, the interview began. Each pastor and spouse was interviewed separately and in isolation from each other. The arrangement guarded against any collusion that might exist between the pastor and spouse. I asked them the main questions from the interview protocol and then asked them follow-up questions when necessary. A digital recorder with high sensitivity was used. The interviews were transcribed by a professional transcriptionist.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data, I examined the transcribed documents. I did a rough first reading of each interview in order to get an overview of the data. Next, I did a second reading of the transcripts and highlighted the themes from each answer. I placed the themes in an analysis grid (see Appendix F). The third step was to do a horizontal analysis, searching for agreement within each group on each question (see Appendix G). Horizontal agreement consisted of shared themes by pastors within their own groups on each question, and the same procedure applied to the spouses. The fourth step of analysis was the same as the third, this time examining the grid vertically to search for agreement across participants and questions (see Appendix G). Vertical agreement consisted of seeking common themes for both pastors and spouses. A minor finding occurred when horizontal agreement was present in one group but no vertical agreement with the other group. In order to become a major findings a theme had to fulfill the combination of horizontal and vertical agreement.

Ethical Procedures

To protect the psychological well-being of the participants, I informed them in the release form that the data collected would be stored on an external drive with paper transcriptions stored in a secure location. The recorded interviews and the transcripts would be kept for one year and then destroyed. All participants remained anonymous, and each signed a document informing them of their rights as well as the steps taken to protect their confidentiality (see Appendix E). The churches they had served would not be named, and denominational affiliation would be kept confidential. The name of the towns where each church was located would also be removed from the study. The ethical procedures allowed the participants to give informed consent to the study. The only people who read the transcripts in their entirety were the two external raters and the transcriber. A referral was offered to Ministering to Ministers and Pastor-in-Residence ministry in case the participants became emotionally overwhelmed by recounting their experiences. Finally, because of my own experience, I recognize that I am biased in the direction of the pastors. The two independent readers rated the transcripts to check for bias in the interviews and analysis.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Problem and Purpose

The problem of pastoral termination is an issue that affects many churches and pastors in the United States. An earlier cited statistic determined that 23 percent of pastors would experience termination at some point in their ministry careers. I have designed a qualitative phenomenological study to explore how pastors and their spouses who have experienced pastoral termination explain the trauma theologically, explore how pastoral termination has affected their beliefs and they live, and explore how termination has affected their relationships. The phenomenological study allowed me to enter into the lived world of the participants and understand clergy termination from their experience.

I focused my research on a particular county located in north Texas. By focusing on a geographic area, I could examine the issue from an ecumenical perspective. The study was not limited to church size, polity, or worship style. Most of the research into this issue prior to this study was denominationally oriented.

The purpose of this study was to explore the phenomenon of clergy termination from the perspective of pastors and clergy spouses who have experienced termination.

Participants

The total number of participants in the study was eight, four pastors and four spouses. The first pastoral couple was older in their early seventies. The pastor and spouse experienced termination while in their sixties, and at the time of the interview, they were six years removed from the event. They had been in ministry for three decades. The pastor served a denomination within the Reformed tradition. The denomination is a

mainline protestant denomination with conservative and liberal factions. The pastoral couple's particular theological orientation is liberal in that while they affirm the Incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection, they also affirm ordination of practicing homosexuals and the practice of same-sex marriage. The couple is Caucasian and are now in their seventies enjoying retirement. They were grandparents at the time of termination. The pastor had attained a doctorate level of education. At the time of his termination, the pastor had intended to retire in one year. The pastor was the senior founding pastor of the church from which he was terminated. The circumstances surrounding the termination was that some members of the congregation and the staff had grown weary of the pastor's leadership style and had decided to start a process to have the pastor leave sooner than he desired. The congregation did throw a retirement party for the pastor and spouse. The couple currently resides in the same town in which they lived at the time of termination.

The second pastoral couple is a Caucasian couple in their late fifties. They have adult children and grandchildren. The pastor had been in parish ministry for over twenty years. The pastor served a denomination that places itself in the conservative, evangelical, charismatic tradition. The couple is theologically evangelical with charismatic expressions affirming the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The pastor was the senior and founding pastor of the church from which he was terminated. The pastor and spouse were in their fifties at the time of termination, and they were three years removed from the termination at the time of the interview. The circumstances surrounding the termination were that the lay-leadership board asked for the pastor's resignation. In this particular denomination, the pastor functions as a chief executive officer and the polity

requires a resignation. The church had experienced a decline in membership and giving. A key home ministry leader decided to start a house church, so he left the church and in doing so took some membership with him. The couple resides in a town different from the one in which they experienced termination and are no longer involved in parish ministry.

The third pastoral couple is a Caucasian couple in their late fifties, early sixties. The church that the pastor served is theologically conservative and part of the Bible Church grouping of churches. The pastor started out in parish ministry in his twenties. The pastor believed he needed more management skills, so he began a career in the business world with a large corporation. The pastoral couple would be classified as conservative evangelical with an affinity toward dispensational eschatology. The interviewee returned to parish ministry in his forties where he served on the staff of a large one-thousand plus member church at the time of his termination. The pastoral couple was in their fifties at the time of the termination and was two years removed from the event at the time of the interview. The termination scenario formed from the arrival of a new senior pastor who clashed with this pastor's understanding of ministry. The senior pastor and the elder board determined to fire the pastor and informed the congregation of the termination before they spoke to the pastor, while he and his spouse were on vacation. The church was informed of the termination via email. The couple currently resides in the same town they did at the time of termination. The couple has grandchildren.

The fourth pastoral couple is a Caucasian couple in their mid-to-late seventies. Their children are grown and they have grandchildren. The couple came to the Christian

faith in their forties. The pastor began his pastoral ministry late in life as a second career from the business world. The pastor was a staff member of a one-thousand-plus member congregation at the time of termination. The congregation is also from the Bible Church grouping of churches, and the pastoral couple would be considered conservative evangelicals with a bent toward dispensational eschatology. The termination circumstance was that the pastor visited a member of the church going through a difficult time. The pastor thought that self-induced physical harm could possibly happen. The member made a false accusation that sexual misconduct took place during the visit. The pastor was asked to resign by the elders and senior pastor. The pastor and spouse had interviewed for another job at the time of the accusation but chose to remain until he was cleared of any wrong doing. The pastoral couple was in their sixties at the time of the termination, and they were six years removed from the event at the time of the interview. The couple currently resides in a town different from the one at the time of termination.

Research Questions

The research questions address three specific aspects of pastoral termination.

Research Question #1

How do these pastors and spouses interpret their termination experience theologically?

The purpose of the research question and its sub-questions was to investigate the capacity of the participants to place their termination experience within the larger framework of Christ's ministry. The investigation sought to discover any meta-theological themes. The major theme under the first research question was that a majority of participants used the theme of Jesus as the Pascal Lamb to interpret their experience.

A second theme began to emerge from the spouses. The spouses agreed in their theological lens that somehow the trauma of termination was a larger part of God's plan for their lives. The issues of predestination, sovereignty, and theodicy were important to the spouses. The issue did not appear in the responses for the pastors; therefore, it was not a major finding.

Summary finding 1—pastoral termination as an embodiment of the ministry of Jesus as the Pascal Lamb. The theology of Jesus as the Good Shepherd contains a phase in which Jesus is clear that he willingly “lays down his life” for the sheep. No being had the capacity to murder Jesus unless he specifically allowed the action to happen. The idea of the willing, submitted, sacrifice of Christ is augmented by the kenosis passage of Philippians 2:5-11. Jesus submitted his will to the will of the Father and humbled himself to the point of death on a cross. The participants in the study identified with Jesus' ministry as Pascal Lamb. Whether or not the pastors were spotless lambs remains to be seen. What is clear is that by identifying with Jesus as the Pascal Lamb both pastors and spouses were able to use that theological lens to explain and reconcile their experience.

Research Question 1a (RQ1a) was the first question to explore the pastor's theological perception of the termination event: “In our ordination to pastoral ministry we are called to represent Christ to the people. How do you interpret your termination experience as participating in and reflecting the ministry of Christ?”

One pastor explained his theological perception of his termination experience:

The Board had a meeting on Saturday morning, I knew we were going to talk about what was going on and what do we do about it, but basically they unanimously asked me to resign. Well, I had to willingly step down. I had to make a split-second decision, and I decided OK I am not going to

fight this I am going to lay it down; and don't say that with this pat me on the back, what a greatly guy I am. It was a very difficult decision. I really felt like the Lord wanted me to fall on the sword and to just lay it down and walk away. I think that I represented Christ in the way that I did it. Was it hard? Oh my gosh it was the hardest thing, one of the hardest things I have ever done, but I think I honored Christ in that decision.

In response to RQ1a, another pastor communicated that he identified with Jesus' passive accept of his crucifixion when considering his termination:

In terms of personal, that was, the remarks that I got back from the Elder Board and from other pastors was one of surprise. In fact, the new senior pastor stated that he was very surprised in the way that I was handing it because you know I accepted what they offered and finished. I asked them if I should finish the tasks that I had in front of me. I carried out my duties until the last day and then shook hands and the we all left as friends, and I've maintained friendly relations with them.

Another pastor thought that because of a false accusation that accompanied the termination that he needed to stay and fight the termination until his reputation had been cleared. The two pastors that responded to the first research question both felt strong conviction that God wanted them to accept what was happening and not cause any quarrels. Each pastor believed that God was asking them to trust him in the termination process and submit to the events conspiring around them. The responses from the pastors were the only explicit statements by the participants about their theological lens of analysis. However, other responses to different research questions revealed an implicit theology of the Pascal Lamb undergirding the beliefs of the pastors and spouses.

Research Question 3a (RQ3a) asked, "How has this experience affected how you perceive and relate to other people in the church?" In response to RQ3a a pastor articulated the shift in his perception of the church and its people:

Has there been grief? Oh my gosh, it's been intense. We watched the movie *You've Got Mail*, great movie, but in the midst of it I got blindsided. If you remember the story when she had a small bookstore and

Tom Hanks had the super bookstore coming in across the street puts her out of business. She goes through this thing of being put out of business and I'm, thankfully it was dark in there, I am like a blubbering idiot, hiding my face and wiping the tears coming down my face and the agony and the pain of, you know, I am watching her lose her dream, which was her bookstore, and I remember thinking I lost my dream of the church. That is what I had dreamed of. I thought we would be there for the rest of our lives. Clearly all of the dream, all of the desires, all of the vision, I mean it all just came crashing down.

The same pastor responded to research question Research Question 3b (RQ3b): "How has this experience affected how you live from day to day?":

Dan Allender writes in his book *Leading with a Limp* he writes about how leaders you know have been through difficult things, come out, they walk with a limp, and they lead with a limp. So, I can honestly say that I am leading with a limp.

The two statements by the pastor display the theological lens he used to cope with his experience of termination. A belief that he has suffered as Christ suffered, and like Christ, God will use his wounds to the good has contributed to the healing process for this pastor (Rom. 8:28).

The vertical portion of agreement regarding the major theological theme of the study is confirmed by the responses of the spouses. The first research question RQ1a gave the spouses an opportunity to articulate the theological lens they used to comprehend their experience of termination. One spouse articulated the crucifying experience of termination said:

When we went through the process we didn't fight it when we saw that the people were determine to have ____ leave earlier than he had planned. It hurt both of us; our feelings were hurt. I think that a lot of it was determined by particular people who wanted ____ to leave earlier than he had planned.

The spouse's articulates a posture that was similar to Christ. I am as to whether this spouse saw their termination as a mirror to Jesus' last week of life, yet the attitude of submission is the same.

A spouse responded to the research question RQ1a:

Every experience you go through (a difficult experience) you're representing Jesus. You are attempting to do what you see the Father doing. So, if you are in a difficult situation I think you are all the more looking to see what he is doing and try and cooperate with that.

I think a lot of times failure is a ministry, difficulty is a ministry, loss is a ministry if you walk through it with the Lord and model it for people. We like to think of the other things and we like to do the other things, but we are often called to something different than we expected.

Clearly, the spouse believed that she shared in her husband's burden as a pastor and that together they carried Jesus' burden as Savior. The spouse's answer is an embodiment of the theological section of Chapter 1 and the spousal section contained in the literature review. The theological section discusses pastoral ministry based on Jesus' ministry as a ministry based on the crucifixion, and this spouse saw that in her experience of termination. As explained in Chapter 2, spouses share in the ordination of their clergy spouses. This particular spouse believes that her husband's termination was a moment in her life in which she walked to Golgotha with Jesus.

In response to research question Research Question 1b (RQ1b), "How has this experience challenged, changed, or confirmed previously held theological assumptions about ordained pastoral ministry?" another spouse articulated her convictions about participating in Christ's suffering as a clergy spouse:

You kind of put people on a pedestal and you see that they are human beings and they have their faults and their weakness. I felt just a tremendous rejection from the church, people that I had known for years. You know when I say that this was _____, but I am so much a part of him that it was personal to me to the point where I felt shame too, it got to a

point where I even had a difficult time just sitting in the service because I felt like when you are fired you had to have done something wrong even though I didn't know what that was. It had to be something.

For this particular participant, she had difficulty addressing the conflicting emotions within herself because the very people she had trusted and considered friends were now asking for her husband's resignation. Betrayal was a part of the crucifixion narrative and this particular spouse identifies with the experience of Christ. One spouse responded to the same research question with the following statement: "It did not change my assumptions about pastoral ministry. You learn to suffer even if it is pastoring." Clearly, participants related their termination experience to the crucifixion of Christ Jesus and used the crucifixion as a lens to cope with their experience of pastoral termination.

Research Question #2

How has the termination experience affected these pastors' and spouses' beliefs?

The purpose of the research question and its subquestions was to explore how the experience of pastoral termination affected the participant's beliefs about God, people, and the church. Exploring the shift in the participant's beliefs about God, people, and the church, as a result of termination was important. For most of the participants, the experience did not change their beliefs about God, or people, or the church. The major finding from the research was that pastoral termination confirmed the participants' belief in the sinful, fallen nature of the human race. The findings from the second research question had the greatest percentage of agreement.

Summary finding 2—humanity's sinful/fallen nature exhibited in church.

The theme of the fallen nature of humanity, sin, is a belief that has come upon hard times in church life. Few discussions about the church today include the condition of humanity,

which is the premise of Scripture and the motivator for God's plan of salvation. The horizontal agreement among the pastors is illustrated in their responses to the Research Question 2b (RQ2b): "How has this experience affected what you believe to be true about people in the church?"

[People] want to get what they want out of the church. If they happen not to in the way they feel they want it then they become frustrated, angry, and resentful. That feeds into their relationship with the community, their relationship with pastors and other leaders in the church. In some sense it is not surprising that there are those in the church who don't appreciate your leadership. They want to get rid of you. They think that someone else is going to do it their way and meet their needs the way they think they want them met.

The response from this pastor describes a group of people who are selfish, shame intolerant, manipulative, and power hungry. The description matches the personality traits of a narcissistic person (See Table 2.3, p. 35). Beyond the psychological categorization of narcissism is the biblical conviction that humanity is sinful and separated from God. The state of separation between God and humanity leads to relational brokenness in the world. The pastor communicated that behavior exhibited in the world is also displayed in the church. Another pastor responded to the same question:

In my case, I think one of the biggest mistakes I made was putting a particular person on the board. That one person created more heartache, more turmoil than anyone else in the entire church in the ten years that I pastored. I think it is very important to be very careful who you put in leadership.

Through hindsight the pastor recognized that the fallenness in humanity would require him to be discerning of people placed in position of leadership within the church. Another pastor said the following statement in response to RQ2b:

The Bible is clear on it as Paul said, "Walk by the Spirit and you will not carry out the deeds of the flesh, the desires of the flesh. My track record of walking by the Spirit probably is no better than anybody else's. First

Corinthians 3:17 told me that there are people out there who will not be doing it right and don't know what they are doing and there is harm. Like I said, I have no illusions as to what goes on in churches as having been in a number of them.

The pastor's response agrees with the statements of other pastors. The fact that this pastor recognizes humanity's fallen nature within himself, shows a high level of responsibility, lending credence to his statement. The final pastor's response illustrates the important fact that clergy need to acknowledge the sin within their own hearts:

They [people] are shaped just like me. I do believe we had a very dysfunctional staff. That is why I was ready to go and indeed had another position. I was halfway through obtaining it and put it on hold for a couple of weeks till we cleared this matter up.

The perspective of this pastor aligns with the perspectives of the other pastors, being, that people in the church behave like people in the Bible, thus the need for a Savior. The clergy spouses also had horizontal agreement with regards to the fallen nature of human beings. Clergy spouses were in agreement about the issue of fallen human nature manifesting itself in the church. In response to the research question RQ2b one spouse said:

Through the years, we have learned that people are people. People are not God and people have their funny little prejudices. People are going to have their funny little prejudices. There have always been people that cause some problems, people who are supportive all the way, just a variety of people and a variety of ways that react to you as a person or your ministry.

Two spouses recognized the manifestation of sin during their experience of their husbands' termination; however, both also recognized the sin within themselves. One said: "[Termination] confirmed what I believe to be true, that we are all human and God uses us in spite of ourselves." The other noted, "[People] are just like me and they have weaknesses. We are all in the same boat. They make mistakes sometimes. I think it was

just seeing the weaknesses.” A final comment by a spouse regarding sin in the church is particularly telling. The spouse described the false piety that exists in church as a means to cover up imperfections. Scott Peck believed that evil people are attracted to church because of the disguise of righteousness that it provides. While the spouse did not go so far as to suggest that people in the church are evil, or even that the people involved in her husband’s termination were evil, she did describe an attribute of which leaders of the church must be aware:

We came to Christ late in life and lived pretty worldly lives, so it never occurred to me that people of the church were any different than people of the world, but in some ways they are worse because they wear a kind of righteousness that is sort of a sham. I don’t think I ever expected more from people of the church than the world.

The theme of humanity’s sinful condition manifesting in a congregation appeared in each interview with each participant regardless of the questions.

The vertical agreement between pastors and spouses augments the finding’s validity. In response to research question RQ1b, “How has this experience challenged, changed, or confirmed previously held theological assumptions about ordained pastoral ministry?” One pastor articulated the shift in his theology of ministry when he said:

I don’t think I had any false assumptions or rose-colored glasses when I became a pastor. I am not surprised by the depravity of man. Hardly anything shocks me anymore. I don’t think it changed my feelings. It was just part of it. Yeah, it may get bloody in here, and that is ok because I am following Jesus.

Another pastor found himself in a position where the termination experience forced him to reevaluate his perception of human nature and adjust it to line up with the biblical understanding of human nature. In response to the same question the pastor said, “I would say some of my assumptions were that people are wonderful. People are in it,

they've got your back. You can count on them. You can trust them, and I see now that you really cannot trust everybody.” The clergy spouses also made statements in other areas of the interviews that solidify the major research finding. In response to research question RQ1b, “How has this experience challenged, changed, or confirmed previously held theological assumptions about ordained pastoral ministry?” one spouse articulated her experience thus:

We know that there are times when the pastor doesn't fit the congregation anymore or that there are people in the congregation who are led by their feelings and beliefs that the pastor is no longer a fit for the congregation or for some other reason they just want to get rid of him.

In a description of human behavior, the particular spouse illustrated that a fallen humanity will make decisions based on feelings or opinion regardless of the pain they may inflict on others. Another spouse articulated a worldview that I believe is balanced:

I think I started out in ministry really young even before I knew ____ and I think, originally before I was a senior I thought man was basically good. But I don't think it took too long before I was convinced otherwise of that. I think after I worked through everything I came back and took a big circle and came back to the same place that I started with. I think we need Jesus and people make mistakes and people hurt each other and that doesn't change calling and it doesn't change the church, and that doesn't change God's ability to use all of that.

In a single response, the spouse manages to articulate and focus the second major research finding—humans are sinful, sin infiltrates the church, but God is still God. In response to the same question, one spouse saw Christ in the middle of sin:

People are people and I think it is always a great lesson in life when you go through those kinds of things that keep your eyes on Christ and not the people around you because they will always disappoint you. We've yet to see the perfect church, and nor do we expect it till the other side.

Pastors and spouses believed that sin continues to affect Christ's church. Moments in church life exist that illustrate a need for a Savior. The participants had agreement in their

perspective that termination was a specific manifestation of sin during their pastoral tenure.

Research Question #3

How has the termination experience affected the pastors' and spouses' way of life?

This research question explored the effect pastoral termination had on the friendships and familial relationships of the participants. The participants relayed that the experience strengthened their family relationships and some friendships, while other friendships were compromised because of the experience. The major finding from the research question was the importance of relational connection in the lives of the pastoral couples and its capacity to soothe the termination experience.

Summary finding 3—the need for relational connection in ministry. The final major finding of the study surrounded friendships and familial relationships as a support system for the pastoral couples during the termination experience. Each participant said that the termination experience strengthened their family relationships, which in some instances made the friendships relationships stronger. In response to Research Question 3c (RQ3c), “How has this experience affected your family and friendship relationships?” the pastors made the following statements:

The termination was a distressing to the family at the time. My son-in-law volunteered to come up and read the riot act to the people. I think for some friends it probably strengthened that relationship.

I am really thankful for my three sons. [My wife] is still my queen, still my babe, so it just gets deeper and deeper; our commitment gets deeper and deeper. I mean there are a lot of couples who go through something like that and it blows their marriage apart. Thankfully, we talked through the whole thing with our kids; they knew everything that went on at that time.

I think my sons, it had a positive impact for them because they got to see how we dealt with it. My oldest son who is in the ministry recognizes that these things happen, and he has learned a lot by watching what happened to us. Friendships, that is another story because some of our close friends at the church became uncomfortable around us. The staff up there that worked for me were very close. There are some people I am still their friend and will do anything for them, but they have sold and mortgaged their trust by the way they behaved.

I could say that it strengthened our family, the bond between my wife and I. She was supportive, my children were totally supportive in letting me know immediately, and we got good advice.

Strong familial relationships provide support for clergy and their spouses in traumatic situations. Among the pastoral spouses, the strength of the family relationships sustained them through the trauma of termination (Lee, "Patterns of Stress" 766-68). Responses to RQ3c conveyed the clergy spouses' need to find support from some other place as the congregations sought the removal of their spouses:

I think we drew closer to a lot of people that encouraged us and supported us. I think there were some people we were distant for a while, that, some of the people we permanently distanced from till we get to heaven. As far as our relationships with our family, I think we are as good as, or better than ever. I think anytime you go through something like this it deepens you and makes you more patient with other people and more understanding.

I have probably spent more time developing friendships, which is something I have not done in the past. I have put more time and myself into relationships. That was lacking. I see that I had no one to talk to.

My daughter said something about, "Well you know mom you've kind of blown out two situations." I thought, it shocked me, she felt some sensitivity towards that. I have tried to be a little more sensitive towards their feelings. But you know I don't think either of our kids were [sic] really discouraged by that or deflated by that. I saw a little bit of that in her, but the rest of it was that they saw God was doing something different with us.

The spouses articulated that termination drew a variety of responses from friends and family, yet having those vital relationships eased the trauma of termination. Friendships and family relationships contribute to the healthy functioning of the pastoral family; the truth is magnified when facing a trauma such as termination (Kiemele). Other questions through the interviews revealed the impact outside relationships had on the pastoral couple during termination. Some responses show the isolation and loss experienced by the pastoral couple as a result of the termination, further elucidating the critical nature of relationships in ministry. While answering RQ1b, “How has this experience challenged, changed, or confirmed previously held theological assumptions about ordained pastoral ministry?” a pastor articulated the need for clergy friendship:

The experience confirmed to me, because of support and care and concern of people in the church, but also friends outside the church, that we are called to be in community, we are called to be in relationship, and all of us need, at least I appreciate, the support of care and concern of other people. Well, that happened during the termination process. Some of the very strong, including family concern and support and other key friends in the area and across the country. I was certainly aware that some other clergy persons had gone through some similar kinds of experiences.

The quote from the pastor illustrates that being a Christian means that one is a part of the family of God (Fee 64-72). The pastor was able to draw strength from his nuclear family and his Christian family. A support network of pastors offered support in a time of crisis. Other pastors in that same group could offer great counsel and empathy because they had previously experience pastoral termination. In response to RQ2b, “How has this experience affected what you believe to be true about people in the church?” another pastor articulated his understanding of clergy friendships:

I am very grateful that the Lord has allowed us to be with [our friends] because we are elated. There is a group of guys I get together with every two weeks, and we just have at it, have we let it rip. We don't hold anything back, and we ask

each other point blank questions. So from that standpoint I like them; I really love them. There are a whole lot of others that we hang out with and we like, love and our kids are down here. Our middle son and his wife are expecting their first baby and that's a thing. It is really fun. It is really healing. It has been so good to be here with folks that we know care a whole lot about us.

For the pastor, the opportunity to be geographically near his children is of great importance. The children and grandchildren offer hope and resurrection even if he had to experience a death of his dream and vision for the church he planted. The core group of men that the pastor described is composed of some clergy and some non-clergy. The group is a safe place where he can have honesty, accountability, and connection.

The clergy spouses responded to other questions with information that strengthened the conclusion that outside relationships are important for healthy ministry. In response to RQ1a, "In our ordination to pastoral ministry we are called to represent Christ to the people, how do you interpret your termination experience as participating in and reflecting the ministry of Christ?" one spouse answered the question:

I really didn't have anybody to talk to. I didn't have any friends outside of the church that I could talk to about it. I would just talk to ____ about it and that was a lonely time, a very difficult thing not to be able to express anything about it.

The isolation the spouse experienced is descriptive of the current relational realities for many pastoral couples. The daily demands of pastoral ministry is challenging without a sufficient support network (C. Walker). The crisis of a termination only exacerbates the loneliness felt by the particular spouse. As a result of the termination experience one spouse has become intentional about developing friendship inside and outside of the church. Developing relationships is a positive change for health.

Finally, one spouse's response to Research Question 3b (RQ3b), "How has this experience affected how you live from day to day?" articulated the loss in relationship, and overall loss, that comes from termination:

One fell swoop we lost our job, we lost our primary group, we lost the vehicle we had for our calling, we lost our income. It changed everything, but I guess it changed nothing. We became kind of like a man without a country for a while.

The reality of loss articulated by the spouse is a sentiment akin to grief when a loved one dies. The spouse's life stage came to an end. The statement that she and her husband became like a man without a country speaks to feelings of abandonment by God and the church. However, this couple had strong familial relationships and friendships outside of the congregation. These relationships have offered a safe place for healing and an opportunity for the couple to feel restoration toward God and the church.

The major findings of the study offer insight into the experience pastors and their spouses had during a termination. The findings are applicable not only to the termination experience, but also to the totality of the pastoral calling. The termination experience and the participants' experience of it brought concepts to the fore that were not in the front of the conscious mind.

A theological understanding of Jesus as the Pascal Lamb and their identifying with Christ allowed pastors and spouses to reconcile their experience of termination to God and to the church. The reality of sin in the world and humanity's separation from God gave the pastors and the spouses a lens through which to view the event of termination and the people causing it. The lens enabled the pastoral couples to come to grips with God, the church, and people causing the pain and to assume a mental and emotional posture that allowed for eventual healing within each pastor and spouse. The

familial relationships and friendships gave the pastoral couples the strength to endure the trauma of termination. The finding illustrated the need for all Christians, pastors and spouses in particular, to build relationships inside and outside of the church.

Summary of Major Findings

The study interviewed four pastoral couples concerning their experience of pastoral termination. The responses to the interview protocol were transcribed, coded, and collapsed into cluster themes. The cluster themes are the major findings of the study:

1. The experience of pastoral termination finds mental and emotional congruency when the pastor and the spouse embrace the perception that they have embodied the ministry of Jesus as the Pascal Lamb in the experience.
2. Humanity has a sinful/fallen nature which is exhibited in the church. The participants viewed termination as a manifestation of human sinful nature.
3. An extended network of family relationships and friendships gave clergy and their spouses support during pastoral termination.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The research project emerged from my personal experience of an attempted termination. Discussions with pastors who went through previous experiences of termination prompted a felt need to explore the phenomena of pastoral termination. My hope was that the findings might offer insight and healing to pastors and spouses who experienced termination and others who were going through the termination experience. The research project focused on how clergy and their spouses perceived their experience.

Chapter 2 explored literature surrounding termination. A bulk of the literature was contained in previous research dissertations. Other literature examined issues of role conflict, boundary ambiguity, and work-home conflict. Another category that aided in the exploration of termination was the phenomena of a narcissistic culture infiltrating the church in both the pulpit and pew. The final piece of the literature review was an examination of phenomenological research as an approach that could offer insight into pastoral termination. The study had two unique contributions to the literature surrounding pastoral termination. First, the study explored termination from the participants' perspective with certain frameworks in view. Previous literature focused on the process of termination, not the pastors' and spouses' experience of termination. Each termination story is unique; however, when examining them from a multiple attestation perspective, a common story and theme emerge. Second, the study interviewed clergy spouses about their experience of termination. None of the previous studies sought to interview the spouses about their experience with termination. Only one study asked questions of the pastors about how their spouses felt about the termination. An exploration of the

perspective of someone who is in the middle of the termination experience but has no power to influence the events going on around him or her is important. A comment made by one of the spouses encapsulates this perspective:

Well anytime a pastor is terminated I think it's difficult for him and it is also difficult for the wife because she wants to be supportive and she feels his pain as much as he does and she would like to just take it away but she can't, so she has to help him work through it.

Clergy spouse voices need to be heard.

Major Findings

The major findings of the study corresponded to each of the three research questions. Each finding illuminates a component of pastoral termination by interpreting the responses of the participants of the study who have experienced termination. Each finding offers avenues for more research into the phenomena of pastoral termination.

First Finding

Research Question #1 sought to explore the capacity of the participants to place their experience in theological categories. From the eight participants, the theme that repeated itself the most was the idea that the image of Christ as the Pascal Lamb allowed them to gain understanding and reconciliation with termination through that image. As such, for the participants, termination was a Golgotha experience. The finding supports the theological section and the biblical images of the crucified ministry and redemptive suffering presented earlier. The first major finding offers pastors a different framework to view and evaluate their ministry. Success and numbers driven models of pastoral ministry leave pastors' who have experienced termination feeling like they have failed, when, in fact, they may have been faithful to Christ. The first major finding encourages pastors to return to a classical understating of ministry as Christ's shepherds.

Second Finding

Research Question #2 sought to explore the participants' perception of how termination affected their belief system. The scope of the questions was general, allowing the participants to associate freely with the two sub questions. The participants centered on the theme that termination revealed and confirmed their beliefs in fallen sinful humanity. Regardless of the sinful nature of the pastor or the sinful nature of the congregations, the shortcomings of either group cause spiritual and relational entropy. The participants remind the church that sin is still an issue in the world and that it destroys. Pastoral termination is an example of the destructive power of sin. The sinful nature of humanity is seen in the issue of narcissism and the second finding supports narcissism impact on a congregation and pastor.

Third Finding

Research Question #3 sought to explore how the participants' way of life was impacted by termination. The responses of the participants centered on how termination affected friendships and family relationships. The third major theme of the study illustrated the necessity for healthy friendships and family relationships outside of the congregation, and the capacity of those relationships to provide a support structure during the crisis. The importance of the third finding is particularly salient when examining clergy spouse issues and their isolation within a congregation and their lack of sufficient support structures. Because clergy spouses are often under great pressure and lack the support structure of their spouse outside support structures are important to their overall health.

Implications of the Findings

The implications of the study corresponded to each finding. The idea that pastoral ministry should be evaluated on the clergyperson's imitation of Christ is not new. For most of Christian history, shepherds were evaluated on their faithfulness to Christ and his gospel. A capacity to endure hardship and suffering as a result of an ordination to the pastoral ministry was an attribute that was considered at many ordination councils. Today, clergy are frustrated because the purpose-driven, church-growth, seeker-sensitive model is used to evaluate pastoral success. Each model is undergirded by the desire to have a qualitative category by which to judge pastoral success.

The syncretism of business practices and business models of success has influenced pastoral leadership and thought. The implications of this merger have created an environment in which pastors are evaluated by the bottom line numbers— people and offerings. The reality has left most pastors frustrated and feeling like a failure. One of the pastors interviewed articulated this reality influenced his termination:

It did cause me to question everything, and you know like am I a failure? I feel like a failure. Lord where were you in all of this. It definitely caused me to look at myself and see ok where did I fall short. One of the big things that I became aware of which is really important, I mean if nothing else happened, I realized what a hole was in my heart, in my soul, that I was looking to other people to fill. I was doing ministry not totally for this reason, but a lot of the reason that I wanted the church to grow was for me. So, that when I got together with ____ and other pastors at conferences, when the questions is always asked, "Well, how is it going?" what they really want to know is how big is your church now. I would be able to say, "Wow, we are growing. It is exciting. We are at a 30 percent growth." It took me getting the wind knocked out of me to realize some of those big-time things of, oh man I want approval. When people would leave the church, it affected me. I was like, "Wow, why are the leaving?"

I greatly appreciate the pastor's vulnerability and honesty. Most pastors in the United States must address external success pressures that activate deep internal insecurities of

approval and acceptance. If the church were to return to a theological model of pastoral ministry based on Christ's ministry, the return would encourage congregations, denominations, and pastors to reevaluate what successful pastoral ministry looks like. This reevaluation could help pastors and congregations in the fulfillment of their mutual calling, which could increase the church's impact in the world.

The second implication corresponds to the second finding about how the church views humanity. A return to the biblical understanding of the human condition is necessary for evangelism. A person who does not comprehend their separateness from God because of sin does not need a Savior. The Holy Spirit's job is to convict the world of sin, but the church does not help by denying sin's existence. The whole point of the Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, is that the three movements of Jesus' ministry are predicated on the separateness of humanity as a result of Adam's rebellion in the Garden of Eden. The finding points to the necessity for the church to reclaim the biblical understanding of sin (Gibbs 1).

The third implication corresponds to a return of preaching to the proclamation of the biblical witness. Sermons today are directed at teaching people how to attain one's best life now or ten steps to better (insert category here). Each sermon approach is considered *relevant* preaching. The biblical understanding of humanity's separateness from God views topics from a different origin. Scripture is clear that human beings cannot do anything right using self-empowered efforts. Rather, God's grace transforms lives, the world, and fills in deficiencies. Human efforts alone are insufficient without God. I cannot create a better marriage, be a more complete parent, or build the people of

God without the grace of the Father, made perfect in Christ Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Reclaiming the category of sin aligns the church with its true message.

The fourth implication of the study taken from the second finding encourages a reclaiming of the biblical understanding of human nature to address the denial that exists in churches regarding people's behavior in church. If a group of church leaders believes that human beings are basically good, then a radical disconnect is formed when confronted with intentionally destructive behavior. Rediger believes that the church's denial of sinful nature contributes to the problem of congregations that chronically abuse their pastors. A recognition of humanity's fallenness versus the assumption that people are basically good would help churches and denomination develop strategies for personalities that are unrepentant and respond only to power. Embracing the view of fallen humanity could help churches and denominational officials vet narcissists seeking positions of power within the church, be they pulpit or pew.

The fifth implication of the study surrounds a biblical anthropology to undergird one's assumptions and performance of ministry. If pastors see themselves and the people they serve as fallen human beings, such a view could lead to an emotional grounding. I have heard college football coaches say, "You're never as good as your fans say you are, and you're never as bad as your detractor's say you are." The Bible calls that mentality *humility*. If pastors are able to view themselves and their parishioners with humility, then when something traumatic such as termination happens they will not be caught unawares. Additionally, a biblical anthropology grounding pastoral ministry encourages the pastor to view his or her ordination as one called among the body of Christ for the body of Christ, versus one called out of the body of Christ over the body of Christ. A ministry

undergirded by a biblical anthropology recognizes that even in the midst of a fallen world Jesus' continues his mission as Savior and encourages pastors to participate in that salvation as a Christian and pastor.

The sixth implication of the study corresponds to the third finding of the study, which is the need for pastors and their spouses to develop and strengthen friendship and family relationships. Clergy tend to be isolated in terms of their relationships outside of the pastor/congregant relationship (Sison 13). Pastoral families are not immune to crisis, and clergy are just as isolated as the people they serve. The isolation that clergy couples experience is partly explained by the reality that effective pastoral ministry emanates from leaders who do not look for their congregations to care for them. When members of a church are in crisis, they have the pastor and a congregation to lean on. When a pastor is in crisis, he or she cannot lean on the congregation, but must have a support structure elsewhere. The only structures that could exist must come from family, friendships outside the church, and other clergy.

The importance of the finding cannot be overstated. Clergy relationships are difficult to form. When the opportunity to form a clergy friendship presents itself, the excuse that is offered as to why pastors cannot pursue greater depth of relationship is that of limited time. The truth is pastors are insecure about relationships with other pastors. I believe the insecurity of pastors is rooted in hidden competitive feelings. However, pastoral families need each other. No one understands the burden of parish ministry like another pastor. Such empathy is helpful. I do not serve in a connectional denomination, but I have heard from other pastors in those denominations that clergy relationships are difficult, due again to competition and the fear that what one shares in confidence will be

revealed. Additionally, permanency in the ministry is difficult to maintain, an extended network of friendships outside of the church provide the support necessary for faithfulness of call over an extended period of time. Finally, clergy spouses often feel isolated within the congregation and believe that they cannot allow members of the church to perceive who they are for fear that the information will be used against them, their spouse, or their children. The finding illustrates the need for clergy spouses to intentionally develop an extend network of supportive relationships.

Limitations of the Study

The biggest limitation of the study was the geographical size of the sample. I intentionally decided to research a geographical area and limit it to pastors who were pastoring in the county at the time of termination. The specificity was decided so that I could claim particularity of experience. However, if I had expanded the sample to anyone who had experienced termination anywhere, and had at some point in time lived in the county in question; I would have increased the size of the data pool.

A second limitation of the study was the age of the participants. The pastoral couples were over the age of fifty and all of them had grown children who were not financially dependent upon them. The perspective on termination from a pastor who is in his or her thirties with children at home would be different from a pastor toward the end of his or her career. Any future studies similar to this one need to research pastoral termination with a view towards younger pastoral couples and their experiences.

A third limitation of this study is the makeup of the pastoral couples. I was unable to locate a pastoral couple that had experienced termination in which the wife was the pastor and the husband was the spouse. The gender differences in terms of experience of

termination when the roles are reversed is worthy of exploration. Future researchers could offer new insight into termination when the *traditional* clergy-spouse roles are reversed.

The final limitation of this study is the socioeconomic and ethnic breakdown of the county. Uncertain exists as to whether the phenomenon of pastoral termination and the finding of this study are applicable to communities outside of the context of the study. Another area of study could be to address pastoral termination with Asian, Hispanic, or African-American communities as the locus of study.

Unexpected Observations

The unexpected observations and learnings happened throughout the entire process of the dissertation. The process of phenomenological inquiry is that the researcher travels the journey of discovery, which certainly happened in this study. The first unexpected observation came from the first research question. Throughout my ministry, I have grown consistently aggravated by the models of the *successful* pastoral ministry celebrated by the church and Christians in America. Each year conferences abound in which clergy can participate to gain vision and reach new levels of ministry. Publications exist that are technique driven, illustrating that by simply employing the right technique anyone can be a better pastor and get more people through the doors, increase offerings, offer more programs, and sell more books. Early on in my ministry at the church I currently serve, the realization came to me that I could do everything that experts say I should do and I could still *fail*. When the realization came, I needed a new model. The model is Christ; a being who used failure to redeem the world. The

unexpected observation applied to lives of the people whom I had the privilege to interview.

The pastoral couples were sincere people of faith, who by the world's definition failed because they were fired. The pastors and spouses are inspiring in their faithfulness to God in the most difficult circumstances. Servants of God exist whose names are not well known, yet desire to be faithful to God and seek Christ even in the midst of great pain. I was privileged to discover the examples of heroic faith in the midst of personal mistakes and congregational brokenness.

The second unexpected observation came from the interviews. Throughout the dissertation process, I assumed the phenomenon of pastoral termination from the perspective of a pastor experiencing termination by the congregation. This perspective arose from my personal experience. However, two of my interviews were pastors that were fired from the staff of larger churches. Most literature surrounding termination operates out of the perspective of a senior or solo pastor who is fired by the congregation or the leadership board. Interviewing people who shared a similar experience in a different context was illuminating.

The third unexpected observation originated from the spouses. The spouses all came into agreement around the issue of the lens they used to interpret and reconcile the experience. The spouses used a Calvinist theological lens to explain their experience. The spouses believed that God had allowed/dictated the events that transpired. Each spouse articulated a belief that the trauma was somehow part of God's plan for her life. In response to different questions, the spouses made these statements:

I think it was a confidence in that fact that he was still in control he knew what he was doing even if we didn't know what we were doing and I didn't question my representing him at that point.

You know, but that wasn't what the Lord had and it just caused me to walk by faith and say, 'Lord do you have another plan for us?' I just trust you to lead us where you want us to go. I didn't have a fall back plan. You're just going to put us where you want us to be.

People hurt other people and that doesn't not change calling, it does not change the church and it does not change God's ability to use it all.

Like I said Christ has to be your sufficiency in all situations and you go through things like that and was no accident. He has allowed that to happen in our lives for a good reason.

Considering the theological context of the county, a complex issue such as termination requires more effort than an appeal to God's sovereign hand. To say that God willed the termination is to tread on a slippery theological surface. If God willed the termination, then the pastor, and the people seeking the termination, have no culpability or responsibility. More concerning, a God who wills conflict, division, and pain is a hard God to worship and love. I do not know why the spouses found comfort in the belief that God willed the trauma. Maybe the theological view allows the spouses to have a sense of purpose in the suffering. Maybe the theological view provides safety and comfort because if God willed/allowed it then someone is in control, whereas, if the situation was not God's will, and people do have a choice in their behavior, then maybe the church is not as *safe* as they would like to think.

Recommendations

The study creates possibilities for more research. Any research and writing that focuses on the spouse's experience of church life, parenting, or personal and spiritual journey would be a great contribution. The dearth of writing that addresses the issues and

experience of clergy spouses is tragic. Any insight gained could help sustain health in clergy families, leading to greater health in congregations.

The second recommendation would be toward the preparation seminaries give students seeking a call to pastoral ministry. The pastors who were interviewed for the study were not neophyte pastors. Rather, two pastors had over twenty years of experience in pastoral ministry, and the other two had ten years of pastoral ministry experience in addition to occupational experience in the business world. Each pastor on some level was not equipped to anticipate a movement toward the direction of termination, and each had difficulty addressing personality flaws in themselves and their detractors. For seminaries to offer courses that address the difficulties of pastoral ministry beyond the framework of conflict-resolution techniques would be beneficial.

Concerning termination, a third recommendation would be for denominational officials to conduct surveys and interviews during a termination process. A denominational official could administer a narcissistic personality inventory (NPI) to the pastor and the groups seeking his or her removal. Such information could reveal the degree to which the narcissism of the culture has infiltrated the church.

The fourth recommendation for research would be to explore employment issues for multi-staff congregations. Not all terminations involve pastors and congregations. Employment issues that exist in the secular workplace also exist in multi-staff congregations. Insight from human resource material could be gleaned to help larger congregations with hiring and firing of staff as well as issues that relate to training.

A fifth recommendation would be for situations where a congregation desires to remove its pastor, in an absence of embezzlement or sexual misconduct, denominational

officials or churches, regardless of polity, need to have a standard approach to handling the group seeking the pastoral removal. The suggested approach would require the church or denominational official to remove the pastor and the group requesting the resignation. Such an approach would discourage people who seek the removal of a pastor for power. Additionally, the tactic allows the congregation a clean start after a trauma and minimizes the likelihood for entrenchment by a particular group of people.

The sixth recommendation is for any person who desires to conduct research similar to this study. A recommendation would for a researcher to narrow the gap between termination and interview. Two of the pastoral couples had fresh memories of their termination; the other two had some separation between event and interview. The design of the study used a ten-year period for participants. I would recommend that the time frame be limited to five years. When people go through a trauma for which they might be responsible, human nature creates human creates a narrative that allows them to place the most positive angle on themselves and the experience. Selective memory becomes an issue the more time that elapses between termination and interview.

The final recommendation is for people who desire to minister to this population. Wading through the emotional minefield of clergy termination is difficult. Instances exists where a pastor is not guilty of sexual misconduct and did not embezzle money but is incompetent, or has a brutish leadership style, or has passive/avoidant tendencies and deserved termination. The issue is compounded by the alarming growth of abominable behavior that congregants and some church staff are willing to engage in to remove the pastor. Sometimes a pastor does not deserve to be terminated but is fired because he or she has made a stand for God and his kingdom, and certain parishioners desire to install

their own kingdom. Navigating these issues makes ministering to terminated pastors and their spouses very difficult. The challenge in ministering to terminated pastors is to encourage them to own their contribution to the termination, acknowledging the sin committed against them, and offer forgiveness toward their detractors and themselves.

The complexity working with terminated pastors is compounded when one considers the population of people who go unnoticed, the spouses and, in some cases, adolescent children. Working with spouses and children to find their power in a circumstance in which they have very little is important. Encouraging the spouses and children not to hate God and the church but to see themselves and the other people through a lens of humility is particularly delicate work. Ministering to the families of terminated pastors requires one aid the pastors and their families find a Christ who is faithful to them in their moments of both righteousness and sin.

Postscript

Pastoral termination is a traumatic experience that causes a pastor to question his or her own calling. Termination is traumatic for the congregation and all who are involved in removing a pastor. In my own experience with an attempted termination, I did not questions as to why, rather, I knew for some time that if I chose to stay true to my call to the church, that a conflict was inevitable. I was aware that certain folks would not be satisfied unless they had control of the congregation. Not every termination experience is like mine. Sometimes terminations are unjustified because a small cadre of people seek power. Other times, a termination without sexual misconduct or embezzlement are justified because the pastor is incompetent. For the clergy and the spouses whom I interviewed, I was an honored that they gave me a view into a difficult period in their

lives. The truth is pastoral ministry is difficult and beautiful. Pastors follow Christ. As such, they have their Golgotha, their empty tomb, their ascension, and their glorification that comes from faithfulness to Jesus in the midst of suffering (Phil. 2:5-11). I pray that the people I interviewed will not abandon their calling but experience the glory that is theirs.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

RQ1: How do these pastors and spouses interpret their termination experience theologically?

1a. In our ordination to pastoral ministry we are called to represent Christ to the people, how do you interpret your termination experience as participating in and reflecting the ministry of Christ?

1b. How has this experience challenged, changed, or confirmed previously held theological assumptions about ordained pastoral ministry?

RQ2: How has the termination experience affected these pastors and spouses' beliefs?

2a. How this experience changed, challenged, or confirmed your faith and practice as a Christian?

2b. How has this experience affected what you believe to be true about people in the church?

RQ3: How has the termination experience affected the pastors' and spouses' way of life?

3a. How has this experience affected how you perceive and relate to other people in the church?

3b. How has this experience affected how you live from day to day?

3c. How has this experience affected your family and friendship relationships?

APPENDIX B

DENOMINATIONAL OFFICIAL LIST

ELCA

North Texas-Northern Louisiana Synod
P.O. Box 560587
Dallas, TX 75356-0587

UMC

Dallas-Denton District of the UMC
Dr. Larry George
16475 Dallas Parkway
Addison, TX 75001-6856

The Episcopal Diocese of Dallas
1630 N. Garrett
Dallas, TX 75206
Bishop Stanton

PCUSA

Grace Presbytery
6100 Colwell Blvd Suite 100
Irving, TX 75039-3112
Rev. Marv Groote

UCC

South Central Conference
Rev. Douglas Anders
9022 Long Point Road
Houston, Texas 77055

Assemblies of God

North Texas District
Rick Dubose, Superintendent
P.O. Box 1188
Hurst, TX 76053

North-Texas Area of Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Southwest region

Rev. Dr. Larry Ross
3525 Lawler Rd Suite 101
Garland, TX 75042-5338

C & MA
Southwestern District
Rev. Mark Searing
5148 Treepoint Dr.
Arlington, TX 76017

Denton Baptist Association
Gary Loudermilk
1406 N. Corinth, Ste. 408
Denton, TX 76208

Church of the Nazarene
Rev. Rob McDonald
P.O. Box 1099
Rowlett, TX 75030

LCMS
Rev. Kenneth Hennings
7900 East Highway 290
Austin, TX 78724-2499

Foursquare Church Office
Mid-South District
David Coffey
20825 Wilderness Oak
San Antonio, TX 78258

Roman Catholic Diocese of Dallas
Bishop Kevin Farrell
3725 Blackburn St.
Dallas, TX 75219

APPENDIX C

LETTER TO DENOMINATIONAL OFFICIAL

Institution

Name

Address

Greetings Mr. Denominational Official,

My name is Bruce Pratt and I am the pastor of Flower Mound Community Church. Currently, I am working toward my Doctor of Ministry degree from Asbury Theological Seminary. My dissertation will be a qualitative phenomenological study on the forced termination of pastors. The focus will be on pastors and their spouses in the (blank) County area who have been forcibly removed from their congregations in the last ten years for reasons other than egregious moral failure. With this in study in mind that I appeal to you for assistance. Because you are the denominational leader for this area would you be willing to place me in contact with pastors that had members of their congregation seek their removal in the last ten years. I would like to have pastors who have either been forcibly removed from their positions or survived the conflict and remained as pastor.

With your permission I would contact these pastors and their spouses and inquire as to their willingness to participate in this study. If you have any questions or need to contact me please call me at 972.955.3899 or email me at brznpratt@msn.com. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Rev. Bruce E. Pratt

APPENDIX D
LETTER TO PASTORS

Date

Dear Rev. _____,

My name is Rev. Bruce E. Pratt. Currently, I am the pastor of Flower Mound Community Church in Flower Mound, TX. I am completing my dissertation for a Doctor of Ministry degree from Asbury Theological Seminary and the topic of my research is pastor termination. I am contacting you because you may be a possible candidate for research. If you have been terminated from a position as pastor in a church, or survived an attempted termination, I would like to interview you about your experience. I would also like to interview your spouse about his or her experience during the termination process. You and your spouse will be interviewed separately.

Should you agree to the interview, our session together will be recorded on a digital recorder. The interview will be transcribed and the transcriptions will be seen by me, the transcriptionist and two other readers who serve as an audit of my interpretations. The recordings and transcripts will be kept in a secure, locked, location. In the dissertation you will be given a surname and any reference to you will be done using the surname. The name of the church, its location, and its denomination will be kept confidential.

Attached is a release of liability agreement that you need to sign in order to participate. Your assistance in this research could be of tremendous assistance to pastors and their spouses who have/or will experience pastoral termination. Having gone through such an experience myself I appreciate the emotional burden termination is on you and

your family. Please contact me by phone 972.539.1203, or email brznpratt@msn.com to confirm your participation in this research.

Thank you for your time and may Christ's blessing flow richly upon your life.

Sincerely,

Rev. Bruce. E. Pratt

APPENDIX E

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN HUMAN SUBJECT RESEARCH

The purpose of this study is to explore pastor's and their spouse's experience of pastoral termination. The study involves human subjects who participate in a single interview. Some personal risk or discomfort is possible as participants recall and reflect on personal views about and experiences of pastoral termination. Such risk or discomfort is likely minimal and can be reasonably managed by each participant. All research questions are designed to illuminate the phenomenon of pastoral termination.

Participation in this research is voluntary. No financial compensation is offered for participation. The interview, its recording and transcripts will be stored in a private and undisclosed location and then destroyed after one year.

Confidentiality will be protected by using no participant's name or other identifying information either in written publication or in a public presentation. Any specific quotes of individual statements will be cited as anonymous. Confidentiality will be honored for all participants except in cases of potential risk or harm to participants or others.

If participants have questions about this research or their rights, please contact: Dr. Michael Pasquarello, Professor of Preaching, michael.pasquarello@asburyseminary.edu, or Dr. Milton Lowe, milton.lowe@asburyseminary.edu, Director, D.Min. Program.

If you are satisfied with your understanding of the information in this document and agree to participate in this research project, please sign and date both copies of the form

Printed Name of Participant _____

Date _____

Signature of Participant _____

Date _____

Thank you for your time and may Christ's blessing flow richly upon your life.

Sincerely,

Rev. Bruce. E. Pratt

APPENDIX F

INITIAL THEMATIC RESEARCH GRID

Pastors

Question	Pastor 1	Pastor 2	Pastor 3	Pastor 4
RQ 1a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -calling as proclaimers of the word -ministry expectations parallel messianic expectations -resistance to the Bible=sin -cause division: “not peace but a sword” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -They unanimously asked me to step down and “get healing”. -In that split second decision I really felt like the Lord wanted me to fall on the sword and just lay it down and walk away. It was the hardest thing I have done, but I honored Christ with my decision. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -God gave me the ability to deal with it without missing a step in my personal walk with Christ. I accepted what they offered and finished. (Jesus on the cross) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -There was an accusation of an alleged inappropriateness. I believe that I needed to stay and fight the accusation because of the damage it would have caused my family and the church. (stand before the accuser)
RQ 1b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -doing the job faithfully impinges upon peoples self-perception and makes them uncomfortable -if we represent Christ then not all will receive us, just like not everyone received him 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -This experience put a dent in my optimistic tigger-like personality. I used to believe that people have your back you can count on them and trust them, and now I see that you cannot trust everybody. -We killed ourselves for the sake of the kingdom. What is the point? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -This experience has not changed what I know to be true and believe. In terms of what my wife I and wanted to do in the ministry, it has accelerated a path we were already on. I viewed it as God giving me an opportunity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The experience confirmed my assumptions about ministry, I did not have rose-colored glasses coming from the business world. I am not surprised by the depravity of man.

Question	Pastor 1	Pastor 2	Pastor 3	Pastor 4
RQ2a	<p>-Christians are called to community; this community helped me.</p> <p>-I was ministered to by those pastors who had experienced termination.;</p> <p>-The nature of the church is to care and show concern. I received that.</p>	<p>-It has made me more cynical than I have ever been.</p> <p>-It has caused more self-examination.</p> <p>-I asked, "Am I a failure? Lord, where were you I all of this?"</p> <p>-I realized there was a hole in my heart that I was looking for other people to fill.</p> <p>-Attendance and membership =Approval</p>	<p>- The challenge of the initial 24 hr. uncertainty, but I have moved around and dealt with job loss before.</p> <p>(certain uncertainty)</p>	<p>-Confirmed. I think as grace givers we should be grace receivers. I know Christ is sufficient; this kind of knocked me to my knees.</p>
RQ2b	<p>-People come to church for many different reasons. (People followed Jesus for many different reasons—Pharisees, zealots, etc.)</p> <p>-they want what they want and if they do not get it they become frustrated and desire to find a pastor who will give them what they want. (Judas) (narcissism)</p>	<p>-It is very important to be careful about who you put in leadership. There were some red flags going off in my head, and I thought let's give him the benefit of the doubt. (narcissist)</p>	<p>-I have never had any illusions or delusions. I have no illusions about what goes on in churches. (See quote)</p>	<p>-People are shaped just like me.</p>

Question	Pastor 1	Pastor 2	Pastor 3	Pastor 4
RQ3a	<p>-I have become more sensitive to the baggage people bring.</p> <p>-People will seek churches that fit their perception of what church should be (consumer church culture)</p>	<p>-We have a group of guts and we let it rip. We ask each other point blank questions. We are with our kids. It is really healing. It is good to be here with folk that we know care a whole lot about us.</p> <p>-Every now and then something will trigger the loss. (movie)</p>	<p>-This is a big step because it helped me look at what people have in terms of their expectations around church, to get a more realistic view of just how effective we can be in ministry.</p> <p>-As a pastor I need to be more engaged with people than we might be on a Sunday morning or meeting.</p> <p>-But the need to be more prayerfully engaged and personally engaged with the people God has given to me.</p>	<p>-I still relate to other people as a shepherd.</p>
RQ3b	<p>-the experience confirmed the need to be faithful and reflective, and more open to the movement of God's Spirit</p>	<p>-I lead with a limp. (woundedness)</p> <p>-I am thankful my sons know the Lord and are having an impact. (for the kingdom) victory via proxy</p>	<p>-Well money has become an issue; we have always tried to live a simple lifestyle.</p> <p>-The biggest change has been in my prayer life.</p>	<p>-I'd like to think I might be more weary of going into somebody's house, but not so much. If I were suspicious I would take someone with me.</p>

Question	Pastor 1	Pastor 2	Pastor 3	Pastor 4
RQ3c	-it was distressing to my family, my son-in-law wanted to take up for me. -strengthen my friendship relationships. -Initially I was resentful	-Drawn us closer. My wife is still my queen my babe. Something like this blows families apart, not for us.	-The impact on my sons is that they have to see how we dealt with it. My older son is in ministry and we learned a lot by watching. -Close friends at church become very uncomfortable around us. Some avoid us. -Other friends at the church mortgaged their trust and respect because of the way they behaved.	-I could say it strengthened our family, (particularly) the bond between my wife and me. We got good advice and talked with other pastor friends.

A final question was, “Is there anything you would like to say that you have not already said?” Pastor 1 answered that the experience cemented the belief that some people will support the pastor and some that will not. Pastor 1 believed all clergy would experience a crisis in ministry, if not termination, something like it. Finally, pastors need to nurture friendships with other people and clergy or they will not have ministry staying power.

Pastor 3 answered that a church, particularly a large one, needs to be cognizant of the different connections a person has in a church. When a church fires that person (rightly or wrongly), they need to handle it in a way that allows that person to end the connections with grace and dignity.

Pastor 4 said nothing relevant to the topic matter.

Spouses

Question	Spouse 1	Spouse 2	Spouse 3	Spouse 4
RQ1a	-We did not fight it when we saw that the people were determined to have ____ leave earlier than he planned. It hurt both of us.	<p>-Every experience you go through you are representing Jesus. You are attempting to do what you see the Father doing. So if you are in a difficult situation, I think all the more you are looking to see what he is doing and you try and cooperate with that.</p> <p>-I think a lot of time failure is a ministry, difficulty is a ministry, loss is a ministry if you walk through it with the Lord and model it for people. We like to think of the other things and we like to do the other things, but we are often called to something different than we expected.</p>	-I felt like I had to keep everything in and I couldn't show any emotions. I did not have anybody that I felt I could talk to. I did not have any friends outside of the church that I could talk to about it. It was a lonely time.	-I think it was a confidence in the fact that God was still in control, he knew what he was doing even if we didn't. I didn't question my representing him at that point.

Question	Spouse 1	Spouse 2	Spouse 3	Spouse 4
RQ1b	I can't say that it has changed that much. We know that there are times when the pastor does not fit the congregation anymore, or there are feelings of people who no longer believe the pastor fits the congregation anymore, or they just want to get rid of him.	-I think after I worked through everything I came back and took a big circle back to the same place that I was in, to start with. I think we need Jesus and people make mistakes and people hurt other people and that does not change calling and that does not change the church and that does not change God's ability to use all of it.	-I felt tremendous rejection for the church people that I had known for years. I am so much a part of ____ that it was personal to me to the point where I felt shame, too. It got to the point where I even had a difficult time sitting in church. -I think it strengthened my faith; it caused me to walk by faith and say, "Lord, do you have another plan for us?" I guess when I look back it was probably the best thing to happen to us, but it was a painful experience.	-It didn't change any assumptions about pastoral ministry. You learn to suffer even if it is pastoring. I mean people are people, and I think it is always a great lesson in life when you go through those kinds of things that keep your eyes on Christ and not the people around you because they will always disappoint you.

Question	Spouse 1	Spouse 2	Spouse 3	Spouse 4
RQ2a	-I do not feel that it has changed much. We go on and do the things we have been doing and react to people the way we always reacted.	-I think I have gone through a period, several years, of waiting, being very quiet, almost being stunned. Just resting in the Lord and waiting for the Lord to revive me. I guess I do not see that has changed my faith or practice. I think I stopped wiring in a journal. I did not seek many active outward ministry situations. I went really quiet.	-It really stretched me to do things I would never do. I am a very quiet person, not really outgoing. It challenged me to be more outgoing, a part of the ministry.	-It has confirmed my faith and practice. Christ has to be your sufficiency in all situations. You go through something like that it was no accident. He has allowed it to happen for a good reason. I was not disappointed about leaving the church as much as I was disappointed for my husband. You feel he was so frustrated and anxious about maintaining his reputation more than anything.
RQ2b	-It has not affected us that much because we have seen through the years that people are people. People are not God. They have their prejudices. Some people are supportive, some cause problems, and there are varieties of ways people will react to your ministry.	-I think it has confirmed what I believe to be true that we are all human and God uses us in spite of our foibles.	-They are humans just like me and they have weaknesses. They make mistakes sometimes.	-They are just like people of the world; they are all like sheep. It never occurred to me that people of the church are different from people of the world. In some ways they are worse because they wear a kind of righteousness that is a sham.

Question	Spouse 1	Spouse 2	Spouse 3	Spouse 4
RQ3a	-I cannot say that has changed. I still resent the people that caused us to leave early. I think people were tired of him telling them what they should be doing, pushing to grow.	-I do not think it has changed, I do not see people differently, and I still have friends. I do not think it has changed. I am not sure though.	-I think I am more open in our present situation. I am uncomfortable going to the (old) church or running into someone.	-I am probably more cautious. That is not true. I am an open book wherever I go. I would like to think I am more cautious, but I am probably not.
RQ3b	-I cannot say that this has changed.	-Drastically. One fell swoop we lost our primary group, we lost the vehicle we had for our calling, we lost our income, and we had to sell my mom's house. It changed everything, but in a way, it changed nothing. We became a man without a country for a while— waiting to hear what God would say. All of the sudden it was over and we did not hear where we were supposed to go next or what we were supposed to do next.	-Financially we have to be more careful. I appreciate ____ integrity. Especially because of the way, I have seen him go through this. It has been a challenge, but we look back and see that God has kept us here to help our son going through a difficult season in life.	-I do not think it has changed. We didn't/don't expect a smooth road but we know who we are serving.

Question	Spouse 1	Spouse 2	Spouse 3	Spouse 4
RQ3c	-I cannot say that this has changed either.	-It drew us close to a lot of people that encouraged us and supported us. As far as family, we are as good as or better than ever. I think anytime you go through something like this it deepens you and makes you more patient with other people and more understanding.	-I probably spent more time developing friendships, which is something I have not done in the past. I have put more time and myself into relationships.	-My daughter said something about the two of us blown out of two situations. Other than that, our two kids were not too discouraged or deflated; the rest was that God was doing something different with us.

“Is there anything you have not said that you would like to say?” Spouse 1: Anytime a pastor is terminated I think it is difficult for the wife because she wants to be supportive and she feels his pain just as much as he does and she would like to just take it away but she can’t so she just has to help him work through it.

Spouse 3: I would have liked the staff to at least acknowledge that I was going through a difficult time. I had no feedback from any of the staff or their wives.

Spouse 4: It was crazy to go through. I was like you can do this to me but you cannot do things to my husband.

APPENDIX G

COMPARISON GRID FOR CLUSTER THEMES

Horizontal Agreement #1

Question	Pastor 1	Pastor 2	Pastor 3	Pastor 4
RQ1a		A decision required obedience to accept what was happening and obey.	Agreement on the issue of acceptance. Like a Lamb to slaughter— Pascal Lamb	
RQ1b	No change	Change	No change	No change
RQ2a	<i>No horizontal agreement</i>			
RQ2b	People want what they want and if they do not get it, they become frustrated and desire to find a pastor who will give them what they want.	It is important to be careful about who you put in leadership. There were some red flags going off in my head.	I have never had an illusions or delusions about what goes on in churches.	People are shaped like me.
RQ3a	I have become more sensitive to the baggage people bring, people seek churches that fit their perception of what church should be		It helped me look at what people have in terms of their expectations around church, to get a more realistic view of how effective we can be in ministry.	
RQ3b	The need to be faithful and reflective, more open to God's Spirit		The biggest change has been in my prayer life.	
RQ3c	It strengthened my family and friendship relationships.	(agree)	Close friends at church became very uncomfortable around us. Some avoided us.	(agree)

Horizontal Agreement #2

Question	Spouse 1	Spouse 2	Spouse 3	Spouse 4
RQ1a	<i>No agreement</i>			
RQ1b	<i>No agreement</i>			
RQ2a	<i>No agreement</i>			
RQ2b	People are people, they are not God. They have their prejudices.	I believe it confirmed what I believe to be true that we are all humans and God uses us in spite our foibles.	They are humans just like me and they have weaknesses and make mistakes.	They are just like people of the world. It never occurred to me that people are different from the world.
RQ3a	No change	No change	Change	No change
RQ3b	No change	Change	Change	No change
RQ3c	No change	Drew us closer as a family, and with the friends that supported us.	I have spent more time developing relationships and more into myself	Our kids saw that God was doing something with us.

Vertical Thematic Agreement

Ministry of Obedience That Mirrors the Pascal Lamb/ Wounded healer	Need for Connectedness and Relationship vs. Isolation	People are People— Sinful Condition	Trust in God's Plan/Sovereignty in Suffering
Agreement between pastors 2 and 3 on RQ1a	RQ2a Pastor 1 Christians are called to community; I was ministered to by those who had experience termination.	RQ1b Pastor 4 I am not surprised by the depravity of man.	RQ1a Spouse 4 I think it was a confidence in the fact that God was in control and he knew what he was doing even if I didn't.
RQ3b Pastor 2 I lead with a limp	RQ3a Pastor 2 We have a group of guys. We ask each other point blank questions.	RQ2b Pastor 1 People come to church for many different reason. They followed Jesus for many different reasons. They want what they want, and if they do not get it they become frustrated and desire a pastor who will give it to them.	RQ1b Spouse 2 People hurt others and that does not change calling. It does not change the church, and it does not change God's ability to use all of it.
RQ1a Spouse 1 We did not fight it when we saw the people were determined to have ____ leave.		RQ1b Pastor 2 Now I see that you cannot trust everybody. RQ2b Pastor 2 Be careful about who you put into leadership	RQ1b Spouse 3 It caused me to walk by faith and say, "Lord, do you have another plan for us?"
RQ1a Spouse 2 I think failure is a ministry, difficulty is a ministry, and loss is a ministry.	RQ1a Spouse 3 I did not have anybody I could talk to. I did not have any friends outside of church I could talk to.	RQ1b Spouse 1 They just wanted to get rid of him.	RQ2a Spouse 2 I just rested in the Lord and waited for him to revive me.

Ministry of Obedience That Mirrors the Pascal Lamb/ <i>Wounded healer</i>	Need for Connectedness and Relationship vs. Isolation	People are People— Sinful Condition	Trust in God's Plan/Sovereignty in Suffering
RQ1b Spouse 4 You learn to suffer even if it is pastoring.	RQ3b Spouse 2 One fell swoop we lost our primary group.	RQ1b Spouse 2 I think we need Jesus and people hurt other people and make mistakes. RQ1b Spouse 4 I mean people are people. Keep your eyes on Christ and not people around you because they will always disappoint you. Complete agreement RQ2b Spouses	RQ2a Spouse 4 It has confirmed my faith and practice that Christ is your sufficiency in all situations. You go through something like that it was no accident. He allows it to happen for a good reason.

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